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For members only

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Ahmed Shawki and Paul D'Amato, Chicago

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Contributing to the ISO Preconvention Discussion Bulletin

This is a pre-convention bulletin leading up to the ISO convention on February 16-18, 2019. Comrades are encouraged to contribute to the pre-convention discussion in the bulletin. Contributions don't have to be long. They can consist of a report on a branch or district activity; an analysis of a local, national or international political development; a contribution on the ISO's current perspectives or an article on a theoretical/political topic.

Please note that if you would like to propose a resolution to the convention, please formulate it as such and submit it in a preconvention discussion bulletin. This includes proposals made in earlier IBs. There is no need to remotivate a resolution if it has been motivated in an earlier IB, and a resolution text can refer to the earlier IB motivation.

So comrades won't be overwhelmed with documents in the days before the convention, please submit them as early as possible. A resolution passed at the 2015 ISO convention states "The deadline for documents to be included in pre-convention bulletins should be a full week before the convention begins."

For 2019, this means that documents must be submitted before midnight (CST) on Saturday, February 9, 2019. Additional PCB to be produced this week, deadline Thursday, Feb. 7 at 2pm eastern. Comrades who submit documents after that time will be required to make their own copies of their documents to distribute at the convention. All documents received between February 9th and the convention will be included in the Post-Convention Bulletin.

Please submit your contribution to bulletin@internationalsocialist.org. *Please make sure to send your contribution to this address.*

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Documents on the Origins of the International Socialist organization

Ahmed Shawki and Paul D'Amato

[Ahmed Shawki was a member of the Left Faction in the IS and a founding member of the ISO. Paul D'Amato joined the ISO in August 1977, five months after the ISO's formation.]

Introduction

Many comrades have asked about the history and origins of the ISO. The documents that we publish here pertain to that history. We felt it pertinent to publish these documents at this particular time, however, not only because it is useful for us to know our origins and history, but also because there are certain aspects of our current debates in the ISO that have parallels, though not exact ones, with those that took place in the IS in the mid 1970s—which led to the expulsion of those who went on to form the ISO in March 1977.

We believe this history is important because it demonstrates that deciding on a course of action without properly assessing the current state and future trajectory of the class struggle, as well as the size and influence of existing revolutionary forces on the ground, can lead to self-defeat. The question of how to develop a perspective requires, as U.S. Trotskyist James Cannon once noted, knowing what to do *next,* without which an organization not only cannot properly move forward, but can "*wear itself out in misdirected efforts and futile activities and come to grief."*

This is a particularly pressing question for us today, as we embark on a markedly new political terrain in the U.S.—not only due to the new socialist radicalization but also from the rise in class struggle, most recently demonstrated by the victorious LA Teachers' strike.

The truth of Cannon's important observation was amply demonstrated by the path taken in the mid-1970s by the International Socialists (ISUS), the ISO's predecessor organization. At a special convention held in March 1977, the ISUS expelled the Left Faction, which soon founded the ISO. The background to the Left Faction's expulsion is explained below as an introduction to the documents which follow.

The IS was founded in 1969 out of the campus-based Independent Socialist Clubs (ISC)—itself a split from the youth organization of the Socialist Party, the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL). The ISC's aim was to continue to promote the politics of "socialism from below" and the "third camp" position of support for "neither Washington nor Moscow." The IS, beginning with about 180 members, set out to reorient away from the campuses where it had been centrally based and toward trade union implantation, beginning in this period to send some of its members into what it considered "key" unionized industries.

The years between 1968 and 1974 witnessed a mounting level of strikes, including a large number of wildcats (unofficial strikes not supported or called by the union leadership); a third of all strikes between the late 1960s and early 1970s were wildcats. The largest was in the public sector: the national postal workers' wildcat of 1970, which involved 200,000 workers and ended in victory. In 1970 alone, there were 5,716 major strikes involving more than 3 million workers. The class struggle in this period remained, however, fragmentary or "sectoral" (ie, without generalizing beyond individual industrial sectors), and the rank and file rebellions largely failed to dislodge the entrenched business-unionist trade union bureaucracy.

By 1970 the IS had committed itself in its labor work to promote "independent rank and file workers' committees to fight when and where the unions refused to fight." It converted its magazine *Independent Socialist* into a biweekly newspaper, *Workers' Power* (which became a weekly in 1975), and moved its headquarters to Detroit, then the heart of the US auto industry. It initiated a policy in which it prioritized what it considered to be "key" industries—auto, steel, Teamsters, and telephone workers—to send its student and former student members into to carry on rank and file work.

The IS reacted to the 1974-75 major recession by shifting into high gear. Based on the expectation that the recession would lead to heightened levels of anger and an intensification of

the rank and file rebellion, it developed a far more ambitious perspective. Under the leadership of Glenn Wolfe, a transplant from Britain who had become IS national organizer in 1975, the IS made a turn toward "agitation" and "mass work," which it defined as "mobilizing a significant portion of the people affected by an issue around a limited program designed to deal with that issue," as a 1976 convention document noted.

In his 1975 convention document, Wolfe argued that the coming economic downturn would lead to a crisis of 1930s proportions that would create prospects for revolution. The IS therefore had to move quickly to transform itself from a still tiny organization of 300 into a "workers' combat organization" capable of leading the class. He wrote for example:

> *We are at the beginning of a period in which it will be objectively possible to make a revolution.… The objective development of capitalist crisis… will necessarily create a massive reaction from the working class…. The question for Marxists is not will this happen, but will it be wasted…. It will be wasted if there is no workers party to unite, direct, and lead the struggle forward. The foundation for that party must be laid down… [W]e will have to bear the major responsibility for creating those foundations. This is why the development of the R&F movement and the transformation of the IS into a workers' combat organization has become a matter of extreme urgency.*

The IS' new strategy was summarized in the IS pamphlet, *The Struggle for Workers' Power* (Detroit, 1975) which spelled out the perspectives of the IS, in particular in the 1976-1977 bargaining round.

> *It is in this three-year period that we will become a workers' Combat group in the lead of a growing rank-and-file movement, or be set back severely.*
>
> *The core group of the new revolutionary working-class political leaders will have to be recruited to the IS during this period and be rapidly prepared to assume political roles.*
>
> *By three years from now we want them [the workers] to be the leadership of the IS, a working class and black leadership, which has already started the process of constructing factory branches.*
>
> *We want to double our membership by the next convention [1976]. In the next 2 years, we want to have the core of a party—worker cadres, factory branches, national rank and file movements, a weekly paper, a theoretical journal, a strong youth group, and a working class and black leadership.*

At the 1976 IS convention the following year, IS leader Marilyn Danton said, "*We are moving into a new period of revolutionary struggles like the period of world revolution that began in 1914."*

None of these goals came even close to being met—either objectively in terms of the class struggle, not subjectively, in terms of the doubling of the size of the group, recruitment of workers, or placing them in leadership positions.

The IS had the mistaken assumption that the onset of deeper economic crisis would further radicalize the class, accelerating the radicalization already underway. The IS, along with most of the rest of the revolutionary left, mistook what Trotsky called a "conjunctural crisis" with a revolutionary crisis of capitalism, and assumed a one-to-one relationship between the onset of crisis and rising class struggle. But instead of bringing revolutionary possibilities, the crisis marked the beginning of a decline of working-class radicalism that coincided with the general decline in the radicalism that had blossomed in the 60s and early 70s. Instead, it was the beginning of the long employers' offensive and the retreat of the labor movement that lasted for the next four decades. But even if this had not been the case, there was simply no way that an organization of 350 people, no matter how dedicated, was going to be able to create a "workers' combat organization" with national influence in three years.

While the IS was able to recruit dozens of workers, it found it difficult to retain them. And while the IS was able in some industries to engage in some important rank and file work—particularly in the Teamsters—the results were far from the stated aims of the operation. To implement this perspective, members were moved from branch to branch, which were regularly reshuffled, and from city to city. The organization became hyper-centralized. The singular focus on industrialization created a two-tiered membership, where the industrialized members were seen as the most important members doing the most important work in the organization.

The hothoused, and futile, efforts to create a workers' combat organization led to burnout, members quitting, a revolving door of worker recruits, and a tendency of IS members to "liquidate" themselves into the trade union movement, at best keeping their socialist politics in their back pockets,

and at worst, dropping them altogether and engaging in support work for various left trade union leaders rather than building independent rank and file groups. The use of *Workers' Power* newspaper fell by the wayside in practice.

As one Left faction document [not included in this collection] noted about the IS's work in Teamsters for a Decent Contract (TDC) in 1976:

> *There was considerable interest among freight workers in the contract and a large sentiment for the goals of TDC. The problem was that there was not enough active support to build a national contract movement with the weight to present a serious challenge to the Teamster bureaucracy. In the absence of this base, the IS substituted itself hoping somehow to create such a movement. This was the point when the IS was "liquidated" into the TDC work.*
>
> *Branches with no Teamsters or only newly industrialized members were urged to build TDC. Other work was put on the back burner. Voluntarism became our method of work: you can build something only if you try hard enough. In areas where it was apparent to our members that a TDC wasn't going to get off the ground with freight workers, they were told to keep trying…*
>
> *It was also during this period that the National Secretary wrote the triumphalist nonsense that the TDC had 50 chapters and was a force in hundreds of Local Unions. This appeared in the International Socialism Journal (British). It was a lie…. This triumphalism carried over to the 1976 IS convention with the overblown estimation of our own importance in the labor movement, the talk of leaving the world of the sects, and so on.*

This adaptation to doing "good" trade union work would later bear fruit in the form of *Labor Notes* (once a column in *Workers'* Power) and in the development of Teamsters for a Democratic Union, an organization started by IS members. The former became assiduous in policing leftists from involvement in its conferences during its first few decades; the latter developed into a trade union reform campaign rather than a rank and file organization aimed at acting independently of the trade union leadership when necessary, which had been the IS's initial aim.

Duncan Hallas, in a 1976 letter sent to the ISUS expressing the British IS's concern over the ISUS perspective, outlined the pitfalls of industrializing ex-students:

> *The "industrialized" student is very often proud of being "a worker" and is inclined to think that there is some peculiar merit in this. He expects to be listened to on the strength of it. The genuine worker, unless corrupted by "industrialized" students or otherwise lionized, rarely thinks in these terms.*
>
> *In order to gain acceptance by his workmates the "industrialized" student often adapts to their prejudices, much more than a genuine working-class militant does, and tends to transmit these prejudices (suitably "politicized" of course) back into the organization. He (or she) tends to become a source of factionalism.*
>
> *This has been our experience—a number of honorable exceptions apart—and we now take it for granted that the "industrialized" student will as like as not be a nuisance rather than a help.*

Hallas went on to point out that the IS in Britain had recruited hundreds of workers, and had even started successful factory-based branches, by doing strike support and *Socialist Worker* sales; it brought in workers not by industrializing ex-student members, but by recruiting workers directly into the organization.

The "left faction," formed in late 1976, consisting of about 60-70 or so members of the IS opposed to the "industrialization" and "mass work" perspective, which was founded on, the Left Faction argued, an unrealistic assessment of the state of the working class and its level of radicalization. It wrote, for example,

> *The tasks of revolutionaries today is to take advantage of what actually exists, to build on the real struggles of the working class, not to pretend to plan the development of the struggle by choosing the three our four priority industries. Our task in the IS today is not to replace the present priorities with new ones, whether white collar, hospitals, or whatever. We must prepare ourselves to intervene, to "give a lead," in the struggles to come, including the inevitable explosions that will come in auto. Preparing ourselves politically and organizationally, however, is*

not the same thing as trying to substitute ourselves for such explosions.

The key arguments of the left faction were:

1. That a small revolutionary group must be primarily a propaganda group and that the IS was not yet in a position to position itself as an agitational leader in the class, though it could play important roles in selected struggles.
2. That engaging in a policy of "mass work" given the size of the IS and the fractured nature of the class struggle meant adapting to "what exists" rather than building a militant socialist minority.
3. That being such a group meant finding ways to intervene wherever it was possible—not by grand national schemes like industrialization, but by "building where you can."

To do this, it needed a newspaper that had a higher level of politics, and did not, like the IS paper *Workers Power*, try to have a "mass" appeal to a mass audience, which didn't exist. The paper, they argued, was being underutilized because of the depoliticization of industrialized members. It was time to put the newspaper back at the center of the IS's work.

As noted earlier, the ISO was formed in 1977 after its expulsion that year at a March IS special convention. (A statement in the March 21, 1977 edition of the IS's newspaper *Workers Power*, written by the IS Executive Committee, compared the Left Faction to scabs in a strike: "Just as a union does not put up with scabs, so a revolutionary socialist workers' organization does not put up with members who refuse to carry out its democratically decided policies.") Upon its expulsion, the Left Faction members immediately moved to establish a new organization and began publishing a monthly paper, *Socialist Worker.* A 1978 perspectives document written by the ISO's then National Secretary, Cal Winslow, indicates one of the hallmarks of the ISO when it was founded: humility, a sense of proportion, and a willingness to look reality in the face:

The first step should be – must be – an honest, realistic appraisal of the circumstances and of the present balance of forces. In the United States, 1978, we must recognize, above all the weakness of the left. The events of the past forty years – Stalinism, the rise of fascism, World War II, and the long period of economic prosperity which followed it – isolated the revolutionary left from the working class. Nowhere was this isolation more complete than here in the United States. For the past twenty-five years, socialists have played virtually no role in the main workers' struggles. And even today socialists remain very few in number, isolated from the main sections of the class because of social composition (students, ex-students, white collar workers), primarily white in a country with a vast part of the working-class Black and Hispanic, split into many groups, and lacking in experience in the class struggle. We can in no way ignore or minimize this reality. To do so is only to seriously underestimate the difficulties ahead, the scale of the tasks, and to exaggerate the pace of development. Proclaiming "new communist parties," programs for "building the leadership," chest-beating about "workers combat organizations"—all this simply makes the situation more difficult.

What relevance does this history have for us today? This history is important today in relationship to our understanding of how to develop realistic perspectives that correspond to conditions in the world and especially our own small size and limited influence in the working class. In Duncan Hallas' letter to the ISUS expressing alarm at the IS's perspective, he spoke of the dangers of "triumphalism"—of exaggerating current conditions as well as what a small number of revolutionaries could accomplish, including the idea that a small number of revolutionaries are capable of giving a lead to the class:

To be blunt, and we must be blunt for there is no room for diplomatic evasions between comrades, we think you are currently on a "triumphalist" course which grossly exaggerates your real influence in the American working class movement and which, unless corrected, will inevitably cause the demoralization of many comrades and a sharp internal conflict in your organization leading to possible splits and decline.

As Hallas notes, "a very high price has to be paid for exaggerated claims and exaggerated expectations." What price did the IS pay? The chief result of its triumphalist perspective was that it moved rightward, and within two years ceased to exist.

These documents form an essential part of the ISO's history, and the debates they contain helped shape the development of our views on perspectives, industrialization, and many other questions. This is

why we have submitted them to the preconvention bulletin. We will, over time, be collecting and publishing more material on the history of the IS, the ISO, and the Left of the 1960s and 70s. We hope to make this part of an ongoing ISO history project.

Documents in this collection, appearing below:

Glenn Wolfe, "Toward a Workers' Combat Organization: The Bolshevization of the IS"—written for the 1976 IS National Convention
Duncan Hallas for the Central Committee of the ISGB, "To members of the NC of the ISUS," September 3, 1976
ISUS NC, "To the Central Committee of the ISGB (a reply to Hallas' letter), October 15, 1976
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[Editor's note: while this PCB is much longer than usual, we think that by putting these documents into one bulleting will make them easier to follow for comrades unfamiliar with the ISO's origins.]

FOR A WORKERS' COMBAT ORGANIZATION—THE BOLSHEVIZATION OF THE I.S.

[Glenn Wolfe, for the 1976 IS convention]

[Note: Some spelling errors and other mistakes have been fixed for the purposes of readability]

Introduction

This document is intended to bring together all the different elements of the present turn we are making in the organization into an integrated strategy for the next period. It is the first time we have attempted comprehensive elaboration of this kind and in a very real sense it is long overdue. But comrades should be aware that the lack of this document in the initial period of the turn was not the result of our apathy or neglect, rather the situation arose out our lack of experience as a leadership, out of the need to launch certain sections of the turn and judge their effectiveness before seeing where the next steps should be taken, and most important of all, we had do insure that an orientation which followed from our theory could be demonstrated successfully in practice. In a real sense this approach is a new one for the revolutionary movement in the USA because forthe first time in decades we can return to the Leninist method of judging the strength of our political analysis from its success in practice and not the level of eloquence of the winning side in an abstract debate.

As far as is possible, this should be the political method of the whole organization from now on. We will judge ourselves by results. We are aware that this transition will not be achieved overnight. We understand the difficulty we will have in developing a concrete application in all areas of work of the bolshevization of the I.S. We know that for a long period ahead the solutions we offer will still be partial and imperfect. Given the fact that the revolutionary movement has been cut off from the working class for 2 generations, it could not be any other way. But we are going back into the class with a determination to give concrete revolutionary leadership and this demands that we leave the methods of the Marxist discussion group far behind us.

If we are to understand the process of turning the I.S. into a workers' combat group we need an acute sense of what we were and what we must become. There is no room for the glorification

of our past or minimization of our future problems. Until the immediate past period we were largely a middle-class discussion and commentary group. We did not make propaganda in the marxist sense of bringing small sections of the class to the full understanding of the revolutionary socialist perspective on the world. Given the level of class struggle and the isolation of the revolutionary left we were equally incapable of intervening in workers' struggles, of seriously leading any fight at the point of production. In short, we were neither a propaganda nor an agitational group. We make no apologies for that because it was not possible to be anything else. As a discussion and commentary group we kept alive the ideas of socialism from below, we seriously prepared ourselves for the tasks we are now facing. We need only apologize for our past if it continues into the present, fundamentally different situation. If the inevitable lag in the development of consciousness in the class and inexperience in speeding that development leads us to act as if there has been no objective change in our situation.

We are now engaged in becoming an agitational group and for the first time creating a working class audience for real socialist propaganda. We are killing off the discussion group because it is now historically redundant and we do not intent to die with it. The turn we are making is summed up by the title of this document, it is a turn of gigantic proportions and no one should underestimate the difficulties of successfully executing such a turn. It is a turn which took the British IS 3 years to partially achieve. It is a turn we have already started [?] which large to complete over the next year. Such a timetable is possible because we can learn from the hard-won experience of Lenin's Bolshevik party and the more contemporary experience of our British comrades. It is possible because we are attempting the turn during the opening stages of a prolonged capitalist crisis, the best possible objective conditions for our success are already present. It is possible because over the years we have developed a strong cadre at ever level of the organization, because thru our industrialization policy we have been with the class, though not until recently of the class, for a number of years. We will achieve the turn in a year because the overwhelming majority of our members are serious revolutionaries who intend to take part in the coming American revolution and will not allow the organization they are building to be left behind by the increasing rapid pace of events.

2. The Beginning of the Turn To Agitation

Becoming an agitational organization, a fighting group of revolutionary workers lies at the very foundation of what we are seeking to do in this period. Of course it is true that IS worker militants have conducted some agitation for a number of years. Much of our union and shop floor work was based on struggles around immediate issues. Nevertheless, our past work differed from the proposed perspectives in several important ways. Underlying many of these differences, of course, is the change in objective conditions. The crisis has hit hard, and with real wages still falling and massive lay-offs growing it is recognizable as a crisis to everyone.

The lack of a response from the labor bureaucracy strong enough to have any real effect on living standards is also relatively obvious. At the same time, the pressures created by depression have sharpened the internal in-fighting within the bureaucracy. The political "sorting out" process described in last years' "State of the Unions" document has moved forward a political faction fight. In this fight it appears that the IUD, UAW, DSOC wing has consistently defeated the Mezny-Shanker wing first at Kansas City, then over the April 26 rally. In at least 2 major unions, UAW and USW, succession crises are emerging.

Sharpening crisis and disarray in the labor bureaucracy are opening up the possibilities for rank and file struggle. As a result, agitational work is beginning to meet with a more consistent, positive response than in the past.

At the local level, a number of caucuses have grown during the past year. While these caucuses continue to experience crisis—as they always will—and retreats, the general trend forward is unmistakable. Most notable is the development of the Chevy Gear and Axle Justice Committee. From a delegates election slate in early Spring of 1974, the Justice Comm. has grown into a fighting, influential R&F organization. The proof its strength is precisely its ability to withstand a number of crises, including in its leadership, and to come through with a sizable core intact. The Justice Comm. has been able to intervene in the politics of the local #235, UAW, and win on a number of important issues. The Justice C… was able to force and win twice a vote to preserve the 2 year term for committeeman. This victory was the result of mobilizing significant numbers of workers. Though the issue may be small, this was an example of successful agitation by worker militants.

Another example of the growing response to agitation is the birth and continuous growth of United Action (UA) caucus in CWA in Louisville. Founded around the contract sell-out of last July, Louisville UA has grown steadily by engaging in a series of agitational actions in the local. UA successfully defeated the local union leadership 3 times in a move to increase the dues of that

local—each time by out mobilizing the leadership. Its reputation as an active interventionist R&F caucus has attracted more and more militants to it.

Not all R&F groups we are familiar with have experienced steady growth, of course. New York UA grew in numbers and influence for a few months following the contract period, but was unable to consolidate those gains. UA's candidate for Business Agent drew a disappointing vote—in large part because one of the other candidates was a militant who was, in many respects, close to UA, but who refused to run on a real program.

In spite of organizational instability, however, a growing number of agitational actions have received a good response. A small R&F group in IBT Local 407 in Cleveland, called Membership Voice, helped to turn out a large number of members to a union meeting in an attempt to win elected stewards. The response to a MV leaflet calling on workers to attend the meeting was substantial. The meeting was well attended. MV and other oppositionists were not strong enough, or well organized enough to prevent the local leadership from "adjourning" the meeting, but the incident was an example that workers will respond to agitational calls.

Similarly, a leaflet about the strike at the Campbell Youngstown Sheet and Tube Plant, netted some 40 phone responses for RAFT. Additionally, RAFT's demonstration in Pittsburgh received a good response.

The Concerned Truckers for a Democratic Union in Chicago were able to uncover a semi-secret meeting called by the leaders of the Chicago Truck Drivers Union, and thru an agitational leaflet to turn out large numbers of union members. The R&F CTDU followed this with a successful agitational campaign around loss of jobs that resulted from the buying of one freight company by another.

On a national and regional scale, we have seen the growth and spreading of the UNC and RAFT. For the first time since the late 1960's the UNC has begun to become national once again. New UNC groups have formed in Indiana and Michigan. Some existing groups in New Jersey have affiliated with UNC. These were the result of a more aggressive approach and the change in the objective conditions.

The examples of successful activities, organization, and agitation could be multiplied, but the point would be the same. Agitation now works. Workers do respond. Thus, even though we continue to confront some set backs, a million problems, and tactical dilemmas, the fact is our work can become and is becoming more consistently agitational than in the past. This has given rise to a number of changes. Changes we must understand and deepen if the turn to agitation is to be carried thru.

3. Completing the Turn of Agitation

In the past, leaflets, papers, and bulletins tended to comment. Even on issues that were agitational in nature—shop floor struggles, union tactics, walkouts—our literature tended to comment rather than agitate. For example, we were not able to take the agitational lead during the 1973 auto-wild-cats in Detroit. UNC and other caucus literature commented on these strikes after the fact. Similarly, during the 1971-72 telephone strike in New York. UA presented a number of strategic and tactical ideas, but not in agitational form. Typically, they were represented a program to be carried out by the union. It was not possible to additionally present tactics that UA itself could lead workers around.

Another way to understand the change we are pointing is to recognize that in the past most R&F groups we are familiar with have acted as pressure groups—whether or not their posture was that of an opposition group. Now these groups [are moving] more and more to a position of active opposition—in the union elections, meetings and in direct actions. In the 1974 contract period, UA was not only able to point out the correct tactics for the union, but to call demonstrations that were larger than those organized by the official union leadership. That could not have been done in 1971. Similarly, when the "oil crisis" lay-offs hit in Jan. 1974, the UNC and other auto R&F groups were only able to comment. This year, though the scale is still small, it has been possible to win unemployed committees in a couple of locals, call demonstrations, and intervene successfully in the UAW's Washington Rally.

Naturally, there were in the past few instances of successful agitation, numbers of agitational articles and leaflets. The point is that now this character of our core is more consistent and generally more successful. Most importantly, this is the direction we must move in.

Much of our industrial work in the past 3 or 4 years has been carried out thru the medium of militants who share large parts of our labor perspectives. We have been able to gain experience and a degree of legitimacy by working thru a group of militants who, generally, have years of experience and a good deal of seniority. By sticking by the R&F struggle thru the years, these militants have won the respect of other workers—even when these other workers are not willing to be active. There is no doubt, that it would have been impossible for us to have come as far as we have in the UAW, USW, and IBT in particular, if it were not for our relationship

with these more experienced militants.

But the advantages of this relationship also have certain problems. Precisely because these more experienced militants have stuck with the struggle over a period of relative quiescence in the class, they often tend to be cynical or skeptical about the ability of the broader sections of the workers to move. Like ourselves, their agitation has often fallen flat during periods of lull. One result is a toughness without which a mass movement cannot be built. But another result is a certain degree of caution. Time and defeats have taught many militants that caution is an essential part of maintaining one's integrity when you can't depend on others to back you up. And in the period we have been thru this instinct was justified. Today however, as more and more workers become willing to fight back—even if the numbers are small at first—this caution can mean lost opportunities. It can mean that the organized R&F opposition in a union can fall behind events and the combativity of other workers. We must be more willing than ever to combat unjustified caution in the militants we work with. Particularly as these militants are predominantly white and largely incapable of leading effective struggles against racism.

Related to this is the way we have related to more experienced militants. When we were new to industry, it was correct to view ourselves standing behind these militants and giving an occasional push, or trying to patiently win them to our politics and ideas. At best we Were slightly pushy political advisers. Today, a number of our am militants have a good deal of experience. Our industrial cadre has absorbed much of the experience of the past. We have learned from those we work with and from our own experiences. Yet, we do not act as leaders. We still act as advisors, pushers from behind.

The turn to agitation in our industrial work must mean that we too turn to agitation. That is, we must view ourselves and in fact become agitational leaders in our own right. Without in any sense breaking with or abandoning these militants we have worked with, we must step out front. If necessary, we must pull others along, instead of pushing them ahead. In short, the turn to agitation does not just mean that we convince others to agitate, but that we too become agitational leaders in the working class. IS industrial cadre with enough time in industry must become public leaders of groups like the UNC, RAFT, UA, and the various groups in auto and IBT.

The success listed above and the many others not discussed show that what we do makes a difference. In many cases, actions, victories or campaigns we know of would not have happened if they had not been initiated, organized and even led by IS members. The very successful April 26 R&F Coalition is only one example of this. The conception that we are hanging around until "the big upsurge" comes is spontaneist nonsense. We are in the working class to build a movement and to lay the basis for an upsurge. We cannot push, cajole, or trick anyone else into carrying out these essential tasks for us. Our method of approaching these tasks at this point is agitation. If *we* don't do it, it will not be done in such a way as to carry out those tasks.

We have never doubted that the prerequisite for building a party that could lead the working class to state power was the existence of such a rank-and-file movement. However, it doesn't follow that the party will simply arise out of the movement we're building. The party too must be fought for, and at the same time. There has been a tendency until recently for us to separate our trade union work from our political work. This has been manifested in such things as not operating on the shop floor as open socialists, being unable to sell *WP* in the workplace and the relative failure of our public forums in attracting worker militants.

These practices arose quite naturally in the previous period, they made it impossible to develop many worker parties but, they were a symptom of our lack of credibility in a labor movement which was still passive. The impact of the crisis on a section of the working class has made these attitudes redundant and in some cases actually harmful to the rank and file movement we are starting to create. Our experience has been that the only real defense against red-baiting that inevitably follows the organization of an effective group is to have already proved to fellow workers that they are not being conned and to have prepared in advance, a political defense of the group from such attacks. The truth is that we need to be open and aggressive about our revolutionary politics not only in order to create other revolutionary workers but also to build an opposition group that doesn't disintegrate at the first pressure from the bureaucrats and bosses. Finally, we must be aware that the strengthening of any rank and file grouping can be significantly aided by knowledge that other workers are involved in similar struggles and are gaining experience that is valuable to the whole movement. As WP has developed it has become a vehicle, the April 26 Rank and File Coalition is another for spreading this experience. We are at the stage where our paper has ceased to be an embarrassment and is now an organizer of our industrial work. It can only play that role if we operate as open revolutionaries. The turn to agitation demands that change in our methods of operation and makes it possible to break down the artificial barrier that has arisen between our concrete agitation and our

general propaganda. Indeed the turn to agitation is the only method by which we can develop a working class audience for revolutionary propaganda.

4. The Development of Consciousness in the Working Class

The potential we have outlined above for rooting our revolutionary politics in the working class in this period, of becoming a genuine, if small, current within the labor movement, exists because we have developed a revolutionary political strategy based on class struggle unionism and the self-activity of the working class which fits the objective needs of the class. In truth, our politics are no longer something that the class needs to embrace but rather the highest expression of a reaction that is already underway amongst the best sections of the class. Over the past period, we have begun to learn how to make those politics relevant to the direct and real experience of workers on the shop floor. For the first time in our history it is clear that if a situation exists where we cannot raise our whole political program to at least a minority of the workers we are involved with, it is solely and totally our fault because the objective conditions that separated revolutionary socialists from the working class no longer exist. We must be clear about exactly what is happening in the class, it is not enough just to make sweeping statements about objective conditions and empty assertions that we are now swimming with the tide. It has not been our intervention that has forced a section of the class to react to present conditions by coming to political conclusions. No, it has been the severity of the recession and the fact that workers have been largely defenseless in face of that onslaught. American workers have been faced with a level of real wage cuts and unemployment that is greater than in any other country in the crisis-ridden capitalist world. Given the level of integration of the trade union machine into the capitalist system, the extent to which the bureaucrats at every level are consciously acting as the bosses' economic police, the fight back by the American working class has been weaker than in any other country. The reason for this phenomena is clear. It is not that the American working class is fundamentally different than the class in Europe, for instance, although there is no doubt that its lack of traditions are a hindrance in this period. It is rather that the mechanisms don't exist for defensive reaction at the shop-floor level. In Britain, workers can cling to the illusions that they can defend themselves against the crisis by relying on the militancy, organization and relative autonomy of the shop floor. In the US a worker coming into the struggle is soon forced to recognize that the whole system, including the corporations, the unions and the state must be confronted and beaten, even if the original aim was simply a partial defense against the economic effects of the crisis. When workers are forced to confront the whole system they are also forced to question the whole basis of that system. That is what is happening now in a small section of the American working class. It is our job to focus and harness that reaction and it is vital that we don't throw away the opportunity that arises. In a very real sense the nature of American capitalism means that less workers than in Europe enter the struggle against it because the odds seem too great. But it also means that those who do take up the fight are increasingly forced to take up the fight against the whole system and for a socialist alternative to that system. It is important for us not to fall into the trap of basing our perspectives on a super-optimism which ignores the reality of life in the plants. Red-baiting for instances is still a greater problem than in any other country in the world. But, we must be aware of the dynamic. The impact of the crisis, the consciousness of Black workers which arose out of the movement of the late 60's, the impact of the Vietnam war and Watergate, all these and many other factors have combined to make workers, particularly Black workers who will be the vanguard of the American revolution, less susceptible to being disarmed by the Red Scare. Workers in the Detroit Justice Committee have insisted that we discuss revolutionary politics with them. The same is true of a couple of members in the Chicago Teamsters group, small numbers still, but for the first time in many years we no longer have the worry that we are pushing irrelevant politics down the throats of workers; it is much more likely that conditioned by past events and experiences our members are too nervous about raising our political analysis. Our assessment of the possibility of raising politics on the shop floor at least to a small number of our work-mates is based not only an abstract analysis but, on our actual experience in key areas of work. Generalizing this experience to all our industrial work is another part of the turn we are making.

It is clear that we are at the beginning of a period of profound crisis in the world capitalist system. The exact nature of that crisis and the way it will unfold over the coming year has been the subject of NC documents which are already available to the membership and is analyzed in more concrete details, in terms of what are the exact consequences for IS, in another convention document. This is not the place therefore to superficially duplicate that discussion, but if we are to understand how revolutionary consciousness will develop in the working class there are certain facts that we cannot ignore. We are at the beginning of a

period in which it will be objectively possible to make a revolution. Such a period has not existed on a world scale since the 30's and it is beyond question that the 50's and 60's were not such a period. Despite the unevenness of economic developments, the short-term recoveries that capitalism will be able to ateg [sic] for some years yet, and isolation of the struggle which will characterize developments for some time yet, there can be no doubt that massive class battles are on the horizon. The objective development of capitalist crisis, of a tendency towards massive inflation and high unemployment which the ruling class cannot control will necessarily create a massive reaction from the working class. The whole history of our class demonstrates this to be the case. In the 30's there were armed factory occupations, general strikes, street fighting in major cities, successful struggles for the 30 and 35 hr week, and the creation in a matter of years of massive industrial unions. In a similar crisis today, a class which is now largely unionized, which has not suffered massive defeats and which has developed a belief that there is not only a right to work, but a right to improve the standard of living, will produce a response no less explosive than the events of the 30's. A response which will be an echo of the struggles of European workers who in Portugal are already contending for state power. The question for Marxists is not will this happen, but will it be wasted as it was in the 30's; will the ruling class be capable of preventing revolution thru war and fascism. It will be wasted if there is no workers party to unite, direct, and lead the struggle forward. The foundation for that party must be laid down now and it is clear from the impotence of the Maoists and other sects in the face of present conditions that we will have to bear the major responsibility for creating those foundations. This is why the development of the R&F movement and the transformation of the IS into a workers combat organization has become a matter of extreme urgency. We are already behind the timetable, we don't yet have the base to ensure that we can have enough impact on the struggles around the contacts which will take place during the short lived 1976 boom to be decisive. Decisive not in the sense of leading successful struggles around the contracts, but decisive in ensuring we enter 1977 as the leaders of that section of worker militants who were active in these struggles The organization by us of that core of militant worker leaders will be a prerequisite for ensuring that the traditional volatility of the American working class is harnessed for the revolution. Consistent agitational work wherever we have an industrial presence is the prerequisite for proving ourselves capable in practice of taking up this leadership role.

Agitation is best defined as organizing our fellow workers in a real fight for concrete and limited demands. The essence of successful agitation is that it demonstrates in practice that victories, however small, can be won by organized workers, that it is possible for workers to impose some element of control over their working lives and that lessons can be learned in such battles which will develop consciousness and build confidence for the bigger battles of the future. Such agitation has always been the method by which a workers revolutionary party was created.

5. Agitation—The Only Road

The concentration of the whole organization on the question of agitation is not simply a method of creating a working class audience for our propaganda, which by definition is not limited but speaks to our whole socialist perspective. Nor is it simply a matter of being unable to compete with the capitalist press, media, and institutions just with our own papers, leaflets, and meetings in the fight for workers ideas. Though this is an important part of it, for our experience has demonstrated that workers ideas about society change predominantly and in a lasting way thru struggle. No, we are building thru agitation because the major problem facing the working classes in this period is reduced to a problem of confidence. It is not fantastically difficult for a socialist to convince a worker that capitalism fucks over workers, that it is a cruel, vicious, irrational and oppressive system. Similarly, the conviction that those who produce the wealth should own and control it is far form being an idea that workers find impossible to grasp. The problem lies not in convincing someone on these questions but in convincing them that something can be done about it. It is at this point in any discussion that workers will tell you "it wouldn't work." "I agree but other workers are too greedy and selfish" or "I am not interested in politics." These reactions are what stand in our way. They are the reactions of workers who have the ability to control the system but have had their confidence systematically destroyed by class society, who have been isolated from their fellow workers and have become apathetic out of a feeling of powerlessness. The job of a revolutionary is to demonstrate that something can be done, that workers do have power at the point of production, that by organizing and standing together they can change something, if it is only whether overtime is worked or the speed of the production line. We should not underestimate how difficult it is ot even create the small victories over the line speed or overtime, but those victories are essential in developing the

consciousness of the class. There is one sense in which getting a small number of inexperienced workers to take the first step of taking some control will be as difficult as getting millions of self-confident workers to take the last step in seizing state power. But it is a step which must be taken if the journey is ever to be completed. Agitation is about taking that first step, building confidence inside the working class and thus laying the basis for the revolutionary party without which socialism cannot be built.

For us the turn to agitation will involve showing not only that we can fight the cureaucrats who dominate the unions but that we can fight the bosses too. That is why the victory of the Danville sit-in was the front page story in WP, why we report on the Woodhaven victory against overtime even though we don't know a single person there and why in a mid-west tractor plant where we do have members virtually our whole emphasis at the moment is in building and strengthening a slow-down campaign as a physical response to the bosses attempts to speed-up. It will increasingly be the case that our branches, fractions, and national leadership will have to spend more and more time and resources on developing specific strategies for specific agitational interventions of this kind in specific places. This is the secret of recruiting workers to IS, abstract sloganizing will build us nothing.

6. Opening the Gates to the Workers.

It follows from everything that has gone before that the turn we are making demands a large and fast recruitment of worker members. The qualitative transformation of IS must go step by step with the quantitative transformation as well. From now on there can be no barrier in our organization to the recruitment of workers. A worker who is ready to work under our discipline in the workplace and accepts the most basic formulations of our revolutionary socialist perspective must be brought into the organization with all possible speed. Cadres are not built in the periphery and there must be an absolute end to any bourgeois academic concepts of what a person needs to know (usually needs to have read) before they are "eligible" for membership. Workers who are involved in a fight to the finish with their own boss or trade union bureaucracy don't have to prove anything to us except that they are willing to fight more effectively by joining our organization.

Without this attitude to worker membership there can be no serious content to the slogan of a workers combat organization. We will not be succeeding if each branch recruits only one or tow workers this year because we will then still be an organization of industrial radicals, but now with a few show-piece workers who far from proletarianizing IS will be themselves increasingly isolated from the working class.

Wherever possible workers should be recruited in groups, where it is not possible it must be made clear to individual worker recruits that their first job is to recruit other workers. From the beginning this new wave of members must be forced into the leadership and we must expect more experienced and initially more competent non-worker leaders not only to step aside for them but also to take responsibility for turning the new leaders into a well-rounded cadre. We must break with the concept of "educating" our members and start training them politically to do the job of leader in the work place. When you open the gates to recruitment it is impossible to avoid losing a proportion of the new members but we must be clear that more workers will leave IS because it appeared irrelevant than will leave because they have clear political differences with our line.

This is why we talk about training and not abstract education. From now on the Marxist theory of the state should mainly be taught on the basis of the actual events going on in Portugal, events that are getting into the newsapers and are actually being discussed on the shop floor. It should be taught on the basis of whether workers in a particular plant should go to law over a particular issue. We will not stop insisting that our members know the Marxist theory of the state but we should be demonstrating why they cannot be effective without knowing it. Lenin' "State and Revolution" will be read but more likely at the stage where a comrade says "I have to know more," not as a step in a dry, irrelevant and abstract study group sessions that is mandatory for new members. Our training will be broader than our education ever was. We will teach our new members how to sell *Workers Power* and in the course of it convince them that the paper's fundamental role is as an organizer. We will teach them to write for the paper, to draw out the political lessons and thus demonstrate why the party must exist, etc. It would be possible to do a whole document just on examples of how we must change the approach we have on training and then another dozen documents on other elements of how we make our organization habitable for workers. But that will be an unnecessary was toe time as long as we are revolutionary enough to change our past attitudes on these questions. If our attitudes are not changed, if the discussion group mentality continues, then several tons of documents will not save us from being a total irrelevancy.

In 1975 we must double our membership. This is a wholly realistic target. In order

to ensure this target is achieved there will be a worker membership campaign in the fall for a period of 3 moths in which every branch and fraction will be focusing on worker recruitment. Such a campaign will demand the production of a new pamphlet, which is the basic introduction to our politics in the context of what is going on in the world, and the American labor movement. We will be producing a new Basic Training Program in printed from which is specifically designed for speeding the political development of this new layer of members. We will be using the paper, and the drive to get worker contacts to sell WP and write for it as the general focus of the campaign. We expect that the weekly WP will start production at the mid-way period of the campaign. Our most impressive speakers will do recruitment rallies in every branch in the country…. And a few places where we will be building branches… rallies which are meticulously organized from the center and professionally executed in the branches. The overall outline of the campaign will be produced, well in advance, in another document and this is not the place to go into all the details but members should be aware that this will be an open campaign starting on a specific date, for a specific period, with its progress reported in WP and with every branch and national fraction having well-planned targets before it starts. One of our newest and least experienced branches in Louisville has already shown in practice that such an aggressive approach to recruitment can succeed. The experience, albeit less spectacular, in other areas demonstrates that Louisville is no flash in the pan but something that can be achieved nationally. The recruitment campaign is being designed to turn that possibility into certainty. Of course, not all our new members will be workers. The recruitment, training, and industrialization of non-workers remains a top priority particularly in places like Bloomington and Amherst. But, we expect that up to half of the new members will be workers and that many of them will be real leaders of the IS before the year is out.

Such a development does not simply involve the growth of our existing branches. We will be setting up more new branches, particularly in the Midwest during this period than at any time in our history. This in itself requires a much more serious organization. We will have to send experienced members to new cities to be the core of those branches. The time when the leadership could spend a year convincing a comrade that in 10 months time they might consider favorably moving to one of a list of several locations is gone forever. Things will move more quickly from now on and in the last analysis we will be directing our members to where they are needed. That is yet another aspect of the present turn.

7. A Periphery of Thousands

There is a danger in a drive for recruitment of the kind we have outlined. It is the danger that we will wipe out our periphery, that in the drive for recruits, workers who are part of our rank and file activity will either be recruited or driven away from IS by the pressure of the greater demands we make on them. We must be clear that that is too high a price to pay for gaining a worker membership. I follows, if we are not to abandon our whole strategy, that the extension of our periphery, the strengthening of our rank and file work was never more important than it is today. And it cannot just be building in the areas where we already have some presence and experience. As we come into the summer and really start to make the contents of this document real we will already be embarking on the next step of our drive to build IS. We will be focusing the whole organization on the problem of recruiting workers into IS. Long before this turn is complete we will be developing and applying concrete perspectives on Black recruitment and we will be putting v ast amounts of our limited resources into achieving results in this area. In a perfect world we would not have to try and do everything at once, but for us the existence of a growing periphery, particularly a larger and more committed Black periphery, is a matter of life and death.

For some time we have been stressing that the building of IS and the R&F movement doesn't proceed in stages, that we don't build the R&F first and then start talking about IS. Indeed it is our understanding of history that only revolutionaries can build even a non-revolutionary R&F mass movement, and we cannot fool ourselves that there are yet enough revolutionaries in IS to achieve this aim. At this stage however it might be necessary to stress the other side of the coin, that you cannot take a breather from building the R&F while you make the turn in IS. The class struggle unionism strategy is the bedrock of our organization, in a very real sense we are making the turn in order to make this strategy even more effective and we will build IS among large numbers of workers only if we can prove our politics in action, in the class struggle.

From the center our emphasis over the next year will be on building real national fractions and capitalizing on our tremendous success on April 26 by consolidating the groups of the R&F Coalition both individually and as a movement. In more serious about our fraction and caucus work in the future and much more bolder in launching initiatives which will either strengthen existing

groups or build new ones. There are new layers of workers coming into struggle; that is a fact. They cannot be met by rank and file papers or factory bulletins which struggle into the light of day irregularly, that involve no consistent work to build up a supporter group, that carry no clear program of short and mid-term R&F demands as a target for the agitation, but flit around from one campaign to another like a gadfly. The bolshevization of IS demands that every branch is divided into well-organized factory cells or trade union fractions, that every work unit is involved in a regular publication with a clear program and every publication has around it organized supporters who are not cut off from the rest of the industry or the RF in other industries. In future we must expect to be judged on the activity of the rank and file groups we have initiated, we must accept our responsibility for strengthening them well and erecting new ones at an increasing rate.

No worker, however enthusiastic, is going to be impressed by IS in a city if there are no regular public gatherings of the branch to attend. Monthly forums which are well-prepared, well advertised, and really built should become a regular feature of branch activity because they are indispensable to developing the politics of our contacts and demonstrating that we have something to say and people to say it to who are not already know to our contacts. Films, dinner discussions, etc. are additional methods of doing the same job and it is a job that must be done with more application than has generally been the case. In the past we have acted as if we lacked confidence in our politics, we have been reticent about putting them forward publicly, we have not been convinced that workers would find our politics relevant. If we don't take our selves seriously then no one else will. An IS member should act with confidence and a certain amount of comradely aggression because it is a fact that someone who has been a Marxist for only a day and never near a factory in their life has something to teach (and also a lot to learn from) a militant who doesn't understand the class nature of capitalist society even though they may have been fighting the boss for 30 years. And it is certainly the case that militant Black workers will never be recruited in substantial numbers on the basis of simply shop floor demands with little political content.

There can be no section of our organization that is free from politics or the process of political development. That may sound [like] a useless platitude until you consider that how many comrades have been in fractions that were not only incapable of seeing beyond the narrow confines of a particular economic or trade union question but also were [in]capable of training members to work more effectively—both as militants and socialists in a particular area of work. Political discussion, contact work, recruitment, training, WP sales are not areas to be left to the branch but also must be the responsibility of the fractions as well. This is all part of brining IS politics to the fore and integrating them into the day-to-day experiences of workers.

9) The Use of Workers' Power

In WP we not only have the best paper on the revolutionary left but also a regular showcase for it that is infinitely more impressive to workers than any single member or branch on the whole organization. In short WP is nearer to being a workers' paper than IS is to being a workers' organization. It is an advantage that must not be wasted because it is still virtually the only thing about is which can convince people we [are] a national fighting, expanding organization.

We have already made considerable progress in expanding the sales and influence of the paper but we have still not succeeded in integrating the paper into al our activity, i.e. it is still sold as an activity rather than being a part of every activity of every member. WP is capable of giving a lead to … of organizing concrete agitation in our priority industries, but only if it is used much more and understood to be the major weapon we have in building IS and making the turn to a workers organization. The increasing sales to workers will have to become increasing slaes by workers, even those who are not yet members, in the various work places where we are building our influence. This is [the] only method of increasing the circulation to the sort of figure we need in this period. It is also the case that just as a worker who buys the paper is more committed to our politics that the one who is given the paper, so a worker who sells the paper is more likely to get involved in the other activities of the or ganization. We should also be clear that we are talking about a workers paper, a paper written by workers and it is the job of every member to play their part in getting workers to write for the paper. The truth is, at this point in time, even having all our own members who are involved in organization and struggle actually writing for the paper would increase its effectiveness immeasurably. We aim to be the paper that militants hae to read to get the news of what is really going on in the working class. With 250 members we should have 250 correspondents, and that is more than even the largest bourgeois daily can put into the field. The leadership at every level of the organization will have a responsibility for ensruing that the paper, because of its coverage, has a

real place in the labor movement.

In October we are going to a weekly paper and the effectiveness of WP for us will increase enormously. Before then we can still increase the circulation by thousands, and indeed we need that sort of base to make the weekly economically viable. This means every members selling more than they did yesterday. This is not unrealistic if we get involved in consistent weekly rather than biweekly selling. Each branch should also be planning for how it will maintain its sales when the weekly comes out, because we will have to get back up to the highest figure for the biweekly by edition six of the weekly, this is the rate of progress we must be making in this period if our aim is to be the pole of attraction for the increasing number of radicalized workers. With the paper, as with most other elements of our organization, the period demands a much greater degree of professionalism. It will be stupid to have a paper that is not on the streets the day it is produced and sold out by day four. We certainly cannot allow the situation that often arises now with the paper being sold at factories on the day the new edition is being printed. Even in the socialist press there is nothing more useless than an out of date newspaper.

10.) From Industrialization to Proletarianization

It has long been our position that the working class has power at the point of production so that is where we should be. We have also correctly emphasized four priority industries where we try (recession permitting) to place our non-worker members who can take industrial jobs. We should be clear that despite the fact that we are now recruiting indigenous workers for the first time and will be putting increasing emphasis on this growth, that the policy of industrialization will be maintained and we will continue to encourage new members and old alike to industrialize. We have many areas of work where we will be recruiting non-workers in the coming period at a considerable rate, that is why the industrialization program must be maintained.

But not just maintained, this area needs to undergo some changes in response to the general turn we are making in the organization. Industrialization will not be enough. Our non-worker members will now proletarianize, to be part of the working class in more ways than clocking on and off at the same time as other workers. The most effective industrialized comrades will be the ones who do not keep their social life separate from their fellow workers, who avoid the temptation to remain part of an IS social clique and actually build real relationships in the work place. We must consciously avoid the impression that we are visitors to the working class, we must cease to stand out like the proverbial sore thumb. Where we live, were we drink, were we shop and what we buy. These trivial questions are part and parcel of the process of seriously and successfully industrializing. They should not be ignored.

Nor can we ignore the problem of how to effectively use those members who are unable to industrialize because we will never be a totally industrialized organization, there will always be members who are housewives, students, or white collar workers. We will fight to bring these comrades into the organization and there will be no second class membership in IS. But it must be admitted that the leadership, in the branches and nationally, has not always proved able to develop patterns of work for these comrades that fit our overall strategy and take the group forward. This is a ridiculous situation, we don't have so many resources that we can afford to have any of them lying idle. There are jobs for everyone to do, jobs that relate to our major emphasis of turning IS into a workers organization. In the present new climate it will be possible to build a working class base from outside the workplace as long as the work is done by trained and committed comrades. This approach is relatively new to us and our experience is limited. It is consequently impossible to give the sort of concrete list of things to be done that are put forward in this document other sections [?] on the periphery, extending our political work, expanding WP, etc. The necessity in this situation for the national leadership to pool experience, develop general guidelines and ensure that whatever mistakes and failures that arise are not repeated in branch after branch is obvious. We are far from knowing all the answers; in truth we don't even have a clear idea about relatively simple things like which geographical areas and specific industries will be hardest to penetrate in this manner. But this present turn also involves developing a leadership and building an administrative machine that can cope with problems such as these. Not only these problems, the leadership has to move on the necessary resources and flexibility to also develop clear agitational programs around experienced workers who will be recruited and stay in non-priority industries as well.

11) Strengthening the Leadership

Given the vast range of tasks that we must undertake in this period, it was never more necessary than it is now to have a strong national leadership in the group. To have even the smallest chance of success our meager resources must clearly be focused and directed to the point at which we can be most

effective. There can be no retreat to a situation in which our branches are all able to do their own thing. Wherever we have good experience it is the responsibility of the National EC to insist that those lessons are concretely applied in all areas. This is why the leadership is being strengthened while the EC is involved in increasing intervention in the branches and fractions. But such a strengthening involves not just the ability to intervene, there are heavy responsibilities laid on the EC as well. We will be required to break with the old methods of giving general guidance of a purely abstract nature. Wherever the EC gives out a line the members will have the right to demand "what does that mean specifically for this branch, for this fraction?" The answers to those questions cannot come from a desk in Detroit. That is why we now have four national full-timers traveling regularly to the branches thus gaining the necessary experience to help give concrete form to our political line.

But leadership rests not only with the national EC. The NC, branch execs, and fraction steering comm. must all accept those responsibilities as well. A revolutionary organization strives to be an organization composed totally of leaders. Not everyone leads internally, those elected to provide a lead will never lead on every question, but from the beginning every member will be expected to lead someone, if it is only one or two isolated contacts in a workplace where we don't even have members. We must be absolutely clear that the working class cannot make the revolution without the consistent lead of those revolutionaries who have a clear and worked out class struggle perspective.

It is equally true that a combat organization, intervening in every level of the class struggle, will find it totally impossible to either decide every element of that intervention from the top or even be able to have all initiatives from the center vetted and controlled from the branches. That is a fact of life in our new situation. It is the situation that demands that democratic centralism becomes a working doctrine in a group which has sufficient training for its members to ensure they are capable undertaking independent action. That is the only organizational method that can guarantee our effectiveness
iand without proletarian democracy there will be no effectiveness. Our democratic process is the guarantee that we speak to the real world, that the lead we give comes from direct and real exper ience. For too long, revolutionary socialism has existed in a twilight world in which cut off from the working class, the leadership has mouthed platitudes and build nothing. We fight for greater democracy in IS not as an abstract principle but as the only method for ensuring the correctness of our line, for ensuring that our politics reflect the reality of class struggle and for creating from IS the future revolutionary party.

The turn we are making demands changes in every single sphere of our organization and activity. It goes without saying that these changes require a certain continuity of leadership. We are immature enough as it is when it comes to leading workers so we will not be dumping any of our small but hard-won experience in this field by having a frivilous attitude to removing the leadership on any level of the organization that has failed that experience. But lets be clear, you can change the leadership without dumping every member of experience. You can replace leaders precisely because there are candidates available with more experience or greater skill. It would be ludicrous to believe that we can grow at the rate we intend to without developing new leaders in the preset membership or recruiting potentially better worker leaders in our key areas of work. Flexibility must be the key to our approach in this area, flexibility and a struggle against inertia. If the leadership at every level of the organization does not change and develop from day one of the turn, our growth will be reduced to being little more than a bureaucratic attempt to strengthen the dues base, undertaken by an old guard leadership, which falls behind developments in the working class.

12) For a Serious and Dedicated Organization

Every line of this document contains the built in assumption that everyone of our members is going to work harder than ever before. For the first time in our history we are speaking of an organization which is composed of the best class fighters, of comrades who have the respect, however grudgingly, off the brothers and sisters they work with. In truth, we are building an organization with a higher level commitment, a much more serious view of its role and a more thoroughly professional approach to its intervention than ever before. Workers will expect us to be more serious than the past, They
will not take the risk of joining what is still a group of non-workers unless every aspect of our industrial work has the stamp of permanence and seriousness. In joining us a worker is risking being fired, risking the well-being of the family, risking harassment in the community and doing it with the certain knowledge that if things go wrong they cannot escape the consequences. These risks have not existed to anything like the same extent for our present generation of members. Our new worker members therefore demand a level of seriousness and hard

work which we have not had in the past. They will demand it, quite rightly, even though they, because of family commitments, commitments in the community etc, will have less time to give than an ex-student with no commitments. A life in the factory convinces workers about the size of the job we are taking on in attempting the destruction of capitalism, they know it cannot be undertaken lightly. It is also the case however, if we are serious in our approach we will never have to fight ideas that say "I know best because I am a real worker whose been in the factory longer than you." Vulgar workerism of that variety has no place in the IS but, we should be aware that historically it only arises with nonworkers or in a situation in which non-workers are proving themselves unserious about their politics.

We are demanding more work, more commitment, more dedication. An outward looking group with open political presence, stronger industrial work, and a worker membership will require it. The period will guarantee that we get results from such an increase in our activity.

We are out to destroy the capitalist state, we are taking on the very institution that under capitalism has a monopoly on legitimate violence. In setting out on the road we are taking great personal and political risks. This idea should never be far from the front of our minds because certain specific changes in our organization follow from it. We must develop a level of security and self-reliance in the organization that will protect our members as far as possible from the worst interventions of the state, the bosses and the bureaucrats. So far we have not done that and we can be sure that we will not recruit Black workers until we do. The Panthers were on the high road to nowhere, their strategy created problems for the bourgeoisie but because of their politics never basically threatened the whole system as we do. Even so the Panthers were physically annihilated. They will try that with us. They will only fail if we already have a secure, serious and highly disciplined organization when the attacks come. Black workers will not join an undisciplined and floppy organization because when the crunch comes as it did with the Panthers, it is suicide to be the leader of such an organization and irrelevant to be a member because the organization will be destroyed. All directives on security must be followed to the letter, they are not the melodramatic response of middle-class hysterics to mythical threats. They are the price we pay for survival as a workers revolutionary organization.

13) Some Sobering Conclusions

Conditions for the creation of socialism in America and across the world have been ripe for some time, but the revolution is not made in a period of stability, it arises out of capitalist crisis. Who would deny that we are in such a crisis and this are entering a new period of revolutionary potential? If we fail in this period, if the organized working class is smashed, then the objective possibility for a workers revolution is put back decades rather than years. We entered this period with about 210 members out of a population of 210 million. That is our weakness, that is why any talk of moving too fast is wrong. There is no way that we can do what we have to do without taking risks. Making this turn now, in this way, involves risks. But there is no gamble in not making the turn to bolshevizing IS. The results of that are guaranteed. We would be irrelevant in couple of years, just another bankrupt sect in the long line of socialist organizations which failed to measure up to the real world.

We need to be aware of our incredible weakness but we must not be paralyzed by it, we have strength as well. Over the years we have developed a set of politics that fits the times. We have built up an impressive cadre throughout the organization from which we can take off. The objective conditions in the class around us were never better. In making the turn we are swimming with the tide for the first time in almost 40 years. Everything set out in this document can be achieved, the component parts of most of it are already being applied successfully in some parts of the group. Experience shows that it can be done. Failure to carry out the perspective of this document with all possible speed would be the biggest disaster ever to hit the organization. We are small and insignificant, we will never be anything else unless we seize the time.

TO MEMBERS OF THE NC OF THE ISUS, SEPTEMBER 3, 1976

[Note: This was written by Duncan Hallas, a member of the ISGB central committee]

Dear Comrades,

We are writing to express our anxiety and concern about what we see as potentially very dangerous trends emerging in ISUS.

No one can doubt the enormous progress made by ISUS since the absolutely essential split with the transitional program fetishists in 1973. The activities of the last year, which were discussed at your 1976 Convention, Teamster work and Red Tide in particular, clearly mark a further step forward.

It is precisely because we see ISUS as the most important and hopeful development in the USA for a long time that we believe a candid discussion is essential.

To be blunt, and we must be blunt for there is no room for diplomatic evasions between comrades, we think you are currently on a "triumphalist" course which grossly exaggerates your real influence in the American working class movement and which, unless corrected, will inevitably cause the demoralization of many comrades and a sharp internal conflict in your organization leading to possible splits and decline.

Our motive in intervening is solely to assist you in avoiding these extremely dangerous developments. To avoid misunderstanding, we do not regard ourselves as a sort of "Comintern Executive" nor do we believe that we are infallible, very far from it. We wish you to profit from our mistakes, and we have made mistakes, so as to avoid the costs that we have had to pay for them. We want to help, and we ask you to accept our intervention in the spirit in which it is made, a spirit of candid but fraternal discussion, of mutual criticism and mutual political education and development.

The basis on which we have formed our opinion is the published material of ISUS (Convention discussion documents and resolutions, Workers Power, etc.) and a discussion between a member of your Executive Committee (who firmly defended your current line) and members of our Central Committee.

What do we mean by "triumphalism"? We read in the Convention report in *WP* (July 19, 1976) a statement by Glenn Wolfe: "The significance of this step to us (ie TDC [Teamsters for a Decent Contract] and UPS [United Parcel Service]) is that it takes us out of the world of the left sects and into the world of the working class, where there has been no revolutionary socialist presence for 40 years." *An unnamed member of your National Committee is quoted in the same report as saying: "Last year we said that revolutionaries can lead the working class—this year we have."*

We do not want to make too much of possibly accidental rhetoric at a Convention. But in your EC Resolutions: 1976 Convention (p3, para 4) it is stated: *"A number of specified lessons can be drawn from the TDC experience. a) revolutionaries can lead mass workers' movements around specific goals."*

Actually, we never doubted it, even before the "TDC experience." It has been proved over and over again in many countries, including both the USA and Britain, long before any of us were born. That, however, does not mean that ISUS is at present leading, or is in a position to lead, "mass workers' movements." It is not.

You have some 300 comrades in a highly industrialized country with a population of well over 200 million. We have ten times your membership in a country with a quarter of your population, a membership concentrated, moreover, in a space not much bigger geographically than the state of New York.

We count the number of our shop stewards in hundreds, of our comrades holding other union offices in the hundreds, of union bodies firmly under our influence in scores. We are the recognized opposition to the national leadership in at least two national unions. We lead the opposition nationally in the student movement. We have been able to mount a significant Right to Work Campaign. We are in the forefront of the struggle against racialism in Britain.

Yet we know very well that we are not yet leading "mass workers' movements." That still lies in the future. Of course, IS members have played a leading roles in strikes. IS members have been a significant factor in union policy making in some cases. But that falls far short of the leadership of real mass

movements.

The truth is that we are still very small and weak in relation to the British workers' movement. We know it and we tell the truth to our members. We know it ad we tell the truth to our members. Because that is the only way a movement can be built on solid foundations. To build on the politics of bluff, of chest-beating and high-pressure salesmanship is to build on sand. We are, perhaps, fortunate in having an example before our eyes, the Healy organization—the SLL/WRP—which has tried for years to build on bluff, bluster and bullshit—with disastrous results.

The EC member of ISUS when we spoke said to us: "For the first time in 25 years revolutionaries are a force in the unions." We said: "What unions, where"? He replied: "The Teamsters." We asked: "How many Locals can you firmly count on?" (None) "How many delegates did you have at the last Teamster Convention?" (One or two).

Now on the basis of the answers given it is necessary to say that you are *not* yet a force in the IBT. That in no way alters the importance of the work you have done in this field. If properly developed, it holds great promise for the future. But a proper development is conditional upon a realistic assessment of where you are now. And you are now still *marginal*, even in the Teamsters.

You are very far from having come "out of the world of the left sects" as comrade Wolfe has it. On the contrary, some of the Maoist sects have penetrated the workers' movement more deeply than you have. Candidly, comrades, isn't that true? You are basically a propaganda organization striving to transform itself into an interventionist organization and still in the early stages of that transformation.

These are harsh criticisms, and designedly so. You may very properly reply: "And what are you? Are you then, a mass organization?" No we are not. We would apply to ourselves much the same description that we apply to you but with these differences: we are somewhat further along the road than you are and we no not deceive ourselves (or seek to deceive others) about our real strength and influence.

The point is that a very high price has to be paid for exaggerated claims and exaggerated expectations. Lenin said: "Tell the truth to the workers." It is, if anything, even more important to tell the truth to the party members. A leadership which fails in this respect is piling up terrible trouble for the future.

We may be accused of providing ammunition for "conservative and negative elements" in your organization—although at this stage we address ourselves exclusively to the members of your leading committee. It is, of course, true that similar criticism can be made by elements that are truly negative. Whether these criticisms—which are valid—serve positive or negative ends depends, overwhelmingly, on the reaction of the leadership, on its ability to recognize and correct its mistakes.

We have spoken of our own mistakes in the hope that you will learn from them, that you will manage matters better than we have done on certain occasions. To be specific: in carrying out an indispensable turn in the orientation of our organization towards worker membership and worker leadership we allowed, or at any rate, failed to prevent, the emergence in certain situations precisely the kind of triumphalism we now detect in ISUS. We paid a heavy price for it. Indeed, we are still paying for it. Indeed, we are still paying for it in one important district where our membership and influence is now very much below the national norm. We lost comrades, good comrades, because we failed to fight their illusions hard enough and in good time.

A little later, in the summer of 1974, we made another political mistake, a mistake in estimating the tempo of the class struggle under the new Labour government. This led us to propose targets for growth that proved impossible to realize. We paid a heavy price for that too. We unwittingly gave arguments and sustenance to a genuinely negative and conservative opposition, an opposition which exploited the gap between expectation and performance to mobilize opposition to all the initiatives we were mounting (intervention in union elections, the Right to Work Campaign) and which eventually provoked a split in our organization. Fortunately it was a very small split, a mere 100 members seceded, but that was in part due to the fact that waverers pulled back by our "gravitational pull," the size and weight of our union fractions (very weak as they are compared to the right wing) and corresponding units in other fields (such as our national student organization). You cannot count on any such adventitious aid. It is therefore all the more important for you to avoid similar mistakes.

You already have an opposition. The fact that your major policy document "Next Steps Toward Building the Party" was carried by only 35 votes to 27 at your convention is an ominous symptom and a most serious warning to any sensitive leadership. Insofar

as we understand the position of this opposition, as presented in the document, "Build a Worker Leadership: Make the IS a Force in the Class," we are entirely out of sympathy with it. Accidental agreements apart, it bears, to us, all the marks of the "industrialized" student.

As you know, we have always been highly skeptical about the policy of "industrialization." We have never practiced it ourselves and where you have urged it upon others (eg IS Australia) we have advised them to reject it. Nevertheless we do have some experience of its fruits. They have generally proved to be sour.

In spite of our negative attitude nationally, a good many ex-students have gone into manual work in Britain, usually from the best of motives. In a few cases they have been able to overcome the difficulties and develop into excellent militants. In far more cases those who have stuck at it and successfully "industrialized" have proved to be very conservative, "negative" if you wish to use the term, in their attitude to the organization and its initiatives.

There is no mystery about the reasons for this fact. The "industrialized" student is very often proud of being "a worker" and is inclined to think that there is some peculiar merit in this. He expects to be listened to on the strength of it. The genuine worker, unless corrupted by "industrialized" students or otherwise lionized, rarely thinks in these terms.

In order to gain acceptance by his workmates the "industrialized" student often adapts to their prejudices, much more than a genuine working-class militant does, and tends to transmit these prejudices (suitably "politicized" of course) back into the organization. He (or she) tends to become a source of factionalism.

This has been our experience—a number of honorable exceptions apart—and we now take it for granted that the "industrialized" student will as like as not be a nuisance rather than a help. It has been put to us that, because we are Europeans, we do not understand the American situation, that the class barriers are much more blurred in your country, that "industrialization" is both a possible and essential method of building a working-class cadre in the USA.

We remain unconvinced, but you believe in it and you have done it. What we want to say at this point in time is this: do not deceive yourself into believing that your "industrialized" students are working class cadres. They are not. A few may develop in that direction but *only* if the organization as a whole adopts a realistic orientation.

To speak, for example, of a "worker leadership" in ISUS at this time is an absurdity. It is an absurdity because there are only a handful of genuine workers in your ranks (some of who may well deserve a place in the leadership on their personal merits, but that is a different matter). You are still basically a propaganda group and to alter this state of affairs you must first face up to it frankly.

To become a party you must, of course, become a workers' organization but you cannot, in reality, achieve this by pretending that your "industrialized" middle-class members are bona-fide workers or by pushing your handful of real workers artificially into "leading" positions. You will simply lose them that way.

Nor do we believe you can become a workers' organization (or a party) without first properly dealing with the relationship between ex-students/white collar comrades and manual worker contacts and members. We do not see how you can build an internally coherent organization by dividing your members into first and third class categories. More, your apparent rejection of systematic work in the public sector—hospitals, teachers, students—reinforces this division. Our experience has been that white collar workers have become much better recruiters of manual workers when they are active white collar trade unionists.

You have to recruit workers, by activity certainly, but also, at your stage of development (and ours for that matter), by winning individuals politically. This does not necessarily mean long arguments about politics (although some workers will want that too) but by political interventions. You have done this already in one case—the Gary Tyler campaign is an excellent example of a political intervention which had nothing at all to do with your formal "priorities," an issue which you did not predict (and could not have predicted) specifically. You seized a chance and you were absolutely right. We did exactly the same thing with the racist murders in Britain this summer—which are not predicted specifically in our perspectives.

The point here is that the whole method of "prioritization" and the corresponding "industrialization" which you have adopted is mechanical, dangerous and, in the end, false. The truth is that neither you nor we nor anybody else can

predict in detail the course of the class struggle. If you had 100,000 members (as the CPUSA had in 1945), you could afford to be wrong about the details (on which "prioritization" crucially depends). But you, with your actual membership (and we with ours) have to be "opportunistic" in the sense of seizing whatever opportunities offer themselves, even if they are not the "ideal" opportunities, even if they cut right across the "plan."

In fact even to speak of a "plan," in any but the very loosest sense, is nonsense. To plan you need strength to mold the world, or a bit of it to your will. You are not yet in that league. You need to pick up members wherever you can—and they will very likely *not*, for the most part, come from conflicts around "major contracts in auto, steel, telephone and coal mines" so carefully detailed in your resolution A4. In fact the whole notion is so unreal, so remote from the experience of the movement, including the movement in the USA, that we would like to persuade ourselves that you cannot really believe it.

At any rate, let us remind you about what JP Cannon (who never lacked horse-sense, whatever his political deficiencies) said a bout the first real successes of US Trotskyists in mass work:

> *Our comrades in Minneapolis began their work in the coalyards and later extended their organizing campaign away from the general drivers and helpers. That was not a preconceived plan worked out in the general staff of our movement. The drivers of Minneapolis were not by far the most decisive section of the American proletariat. We began our real activity in the labor movement in those places where the opportunity was open to us. It is not possible to select such occasions arbitrarily according to whim or preference. One must enter a mass movement where the door is open.*

And that surely is equally true today. The smaller and weaker the organization, the more true it is. To speak of planning, even in the most flexible sense, is to assume that you have a strength that you do not have.

This, of course, is equally true of "blocs" with other forces in the unions. To even speak of a "bloc" you need forces of your own. In no case can a bloc with reformists or centrists in the union serve the interests of revolutionaries unless they dispose of serious forces themselves. Otherwise the "revolutionaries" will merely serve as attorneys for some "left" bureaucrat or other or they will be booted out by their allies at a time the latter find opportune. There is not substitute for winning a base of your own.

When we hear that the gap between pretension and power is to be bridged by something called "transitional politics" we find it difficult to choke back laughter—or tears. We hope, we sincerely hope, that we have misunderstood your drift on this question. We find it very hard to believe that you could really have forgotten the struggle for the survival of your organization that you had to wage against Landy, Tabor, and the rest.

We wish to avoid all unnecessary disputes, to raise only those matters which we believe it is obligatory for us to raise. We will therefore refrain from comment on your international perspective—except the one issue which cannot be passed over: Portugal.

You have chosen to reiterate (Resolution D2) an uncritical attitude towards the PRP [Portuguese Revolutionary Party]. We dearly wish that what you say in para 3 of that resolution were true. Glenn Wolfe, in an article printed in IS 88, goes even further. "Thankfully we are now learning lessons from the PRP in Portugal as well, lessons we could not have learned from Britain."

Unfortunately any "lessons" so learned can only be lessons on oscillating between ultra-leftism and opportunism. We are very sorry that it is so. But facts are facts. The PRP, originating as a Guevarist formation, has moved a long way toward a consistent communist (Leninist is the term you use) position. But it has not yet reached it and it is the worst possible service to the PRP to pretend otherwise.

We are, frankly, puzzled by your attitude on this question. Our own position has been developed in no less that eleven articles (one of large pamphlet length) in *International Socialism*. If you think we are wrong, either on fact or interpretation, why not help us to correct our errors by submitting your own views for publication? We will gladly print them.

So far as we know you have yourselves published nothing serious on Portugal (we leave aside reports in *Workers Power*). Yet you persist in reiterating, without supporting evidence or argument, an attitude which we believe we have shown, in detail, to be basically wrong. Why is this?

We started by saying that we seek a candid but fraternal discussion. It is entirely possible that you may convince us that some of our criticisms are

misplaced. Yet we keep coming back to the obvious contradiction between the triumphalist tone of your publication and what we know (from ISUS itself, not hostile sources) to be the reality.

Thus, EC Resolution B3 speaks of "the stagnation of *WP* circulation." Gay Semel, in the *Workers Power* Convention report, says "circulation has dropped." Whichever is correct, it is inconceivable for us that advances of the sort claimed in Glenn Wolfe's conference report ("You are not members of the same organization that existed a year ago. The International Socialists is now part of the working class") could possibly be real without substantially lifting the sale of *Workers Power*.

We do not doubt that the enthusiasm of your members, and the drive of the leadership, has made possible some real advance. But we believe that you grossly exaggerate its scale and we believe that, unless you correct your course, you will be driven into increasingly false political positions in an attempt to conceal what will become a growing gulf between pretensions and reality. It would be tragic if this were allowed to happen. And it need not happen. There is still time to avert it.

Central Committee, ISGB

TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE ISGB
Oct. 15, 1976
Dear Comrades,
In your letter to our National Committee dated September 3, 1976, you criticize our strategy for building a revolutionary workers party in the USA. You assert that "potentially very dangerous trends" are emerging in the ISUS, and you warn us that unless we change course, we can expect "sharp internal conflict" in our organization leading to possible splits and decline. You assure us that your motive in intervening is solely to assist us "in avoiding these extremely dangerous developments."

To be blunt, we find that your criticisms, in almost every particular miss the mark. We are making a detailed reply to your letter so that in the future, you will be better informed on the conditions facing American revolutionaries and thereby render more useful any future observations you have. You, comrades, have a responsibility to play a vital leading role for our
tendency internationally. To carry out that task, you will have to learn to develop a more flexible approach in applying your experiences to the needs of revolutionaries in different countries, with different conditions, and facing different problems.

We should state from the outset that we recognize our organization is, in fact, facing serious problems at this time. We have not kept this a secret from our membership, or from you. Nor did we need a warning letter from Britain to inform us. We already are ·involved in a struggle to overcome these problems as can be seen from the documents of our October NC that are already in your hands. But the road forward is not at all the one charted by your letter. As

we will show, following your advice would mean going backwards—to use your words, giving up the "enormous progress" we have made in the last three years.

Focus on Basic Industry

The central, consistent theme in your advice to the ISUS, is your effort to convince us to turn away from a policy of "industrialization" and "priorities." You were successful in convincing the Canadians of this course, and now you turn to us. We have already written to you, some time ago, a detailed explanation of our strategy of industrializing members from middle-class backgrounds in major industrial unions. You have not yet made any comment or reply to this document, or even acknowledged its existence. But, since in this second letter on the subject, you still refuse to deal with the facts as they actually exist, we will turn again, briefly, to this very important question.

You tell us: "*Do note deceive yourself into believing that your 'industrialized' students are working-class cadres.*" (emph. in original). Comrades, are you trying to tell us you think we live in a fantasy world. We don't. We are painfully aware that our main struggle to develop a revolutionary industrial working class cadre still lies ahead. But to fol1ow through on the logic of your argument would represent a retreat from that struggle. You tell us to end our policy of industrialization so that we can face the fact that we "are still basically a propaganda group." The logic of this argument is very dangerous to our development as a serious revolutionary organization.

Your argument for our members to leave the plants is an argument for us to stop relating our revolutionary politics to the real everyday experiences of workers. Instead, you suggest we go back to commenting on things we do not understand or face directly from a cozy position outside the plant, outside the struggle, and outside the working class. You ask us to give up this progress we have made toward rooting our politics in the working class. This would inevitably take us back to a campus focus. If we followed your advice, it would not be long before members working from the outside on the basis of inspired ignorance start pressuring the leadership to be allowed to conduct their major political activity in arenas where they have knowledge and experience: among students, middle-class radicals, teachers, and so forth. This retreat would be an historic defeat in building a revolutionary party in the US.

Such a defeat could not be glossed over or hidden by some bogus perspective of doing "systematic work in the public sector." At the rist of being repetitive, we must remind you that the public sector in the US is not at all like the public sector in Britain. For example, there is no US equivalent to the National Union of Public Employees. If there were anything approaching this equivalent, it would have more than two million members.

In fact, a number of our leading cadres have been active in the public sector unions. We have a long history of involvement in them, particularly the American Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Our experience in these unions convinced us that they were not going to be a primary source of militancy in the working class. Both of these unions were "priorities" of the ISUS until a couple of years ago when we discontinued encouraging people to get jobs covered by those unions.

The reasons for not emphasizing that work were numerous. For one thing, the politics of those unions, not just the leaders, tended to move to right as the crisis heated up. Second, and a cause of the first, these union are extremely weak. Even in a well organized city like New York, the weakness of the unions, and not just the betrayal of the leaders, have undermined any serious response to the city crisis.

If we had followed your advice and concentrated in the public sector, we would, in fact, be operating in a sea of defeat. Such a milieu could only have unhealthy and defeatist effects on the organization. Fortunately, we have chosen to concentrate on the strongest sections of the working class. That is why we did not agree with you in 1973 when you suggested we "rethink" our teamster priority. On the whole our Priority Unions represent those sections best able to mount resistance to the employers offensive, and to give a real lead to the rest of the class. Even inside the public sector, the important [centers?—*a portion of the line is blank*] of power reside, not among white collar workers, but in blue collar areas like maintenance and sanitation.

Your advice to concentrate on the public sector is based on the same kind of impressionism that led many sections of the New Left of the sixties to concentrate their efforts among the most oppressed sections of the working class. They concentrated on hospitals, small sweatshops, and unorganized plants filled with minority women workers earning substandard wages. A lot of energy went into this

work—but practically nothing remains to show for it.

Your letter tries to tell us that the key to becoming a workers organization is "properly dealing with the relationship between ex-students/white-collar comrades and manual worker contacts and members." You say: "Our experience has been that white-collar workers have become much better recruiters of manual workers when they are active white-collar trade unionists." You imply that the ISGB got its industrial worker base through the work of white-collar unionists. But has you know, this is not how it happened.

Your growth among industrial workers in 1973/4 came out of direct work in those arenas—not as a consequence of successful white collar/ union work. It is only in the last two years, when you have lost much of that industrial base, that you have begun to elevate white-collar trade union work to the status of a critical stage that must be gone through before a solid base in industry can be built. This didn't work for you, it won't work for us, and it will only disorient revolutionaries in other countries who take this advice you give seriously.

We believe your request that we drop our priorities is made in good faith. But given our size, and the size of the country in which we operate, we would end up spreading our resources so thin that our impact on the class struggle would evaporate into nothing. To build anything of value, it is necessary to have an effect, however small, on real forces in the real world. And for a small group, this can only be done through steady and consistent work.

Priorities and planning

To ditch priorities is to ditch steady and consistent work. Rather, you advice us to seize every opportunity that offers itself. But the net result of chasing after everything that moves is to end up with nothing. We know because we spent years trying this method before we discovered the need for concentration and priorities.

In the past few years, we have bad branches that were unable to get many members into priority industries. Out of necessity, they were forced to seize any opportunity that presented itself—and this is what we encouraged them to do. There were heavy bursts of energy, but few solid accomplishments. And the comrades involved developed a practical understanding of the class struggle more slowly and with less depth. On the whole, we have little to show for this activity.

Your experience is similar. In the early 1970's the ISGB tried the strategy of chasing everything that moves. One week it was the garbage workers who were in the vanguard of the class. But with no work that went before, and with no plan to follow-up afterwards (because when garbage workers stopped moving, someone else was sure to start) you got nothing out of it—no membership, no rank and file organization. You followed the same pattern in the national postal strike, and again with variations, in the very important miners strikes.

Intervention in the mines did yield temporary progress: a rank and file paper and several dozen new members. But without a policy of prioritizing work in the mines and contentrating resources on that work, the beachhead in the mines was lost. By 1975 the paper and the members were gone.

If we were to take your advice, we would end up skipping from issue to issue and from struggle to struggle—acting like a band of dilettantes. Se would be an unserious organization. But in the US at this time, the question of being a revolutionary can not be taken lightly. We place greater stress than you on the question of cadre formation precisely because of the conditions we face.

A good quarter of our membership is solidly enough committed to put their whole life at the service of the organization. These are comrades who, at the request of the organization, will pull up roots, break ties with family and friends, leave well paid jobs to move to the place where we need them, work in the industry we ask them to, and live in poverty as long as required. These cadre are the core of our organization. The purpose of concentration and prioritization is to- maximize their effectiveness. When we open up a new area of work—for example our Free Gary Tyler campaign—we don't dabble: we make a serious, long-term commitment. Any other policy would undermine our effort to build a dedicated and effective organization.

In your effort to convince us that it is "nonsense" to plan, you use a quote from Cannon that seems to show that US Trotskyists in the 1930s didn't prioritize and plan work. One would think that the Trotskyists went into the Minneapolis coal yards either by accident or because that was where the action was. Farrell Dobbs detailed history, "Teamster Rebellion," tells quite a different story.

Leading members of the Communist League (the US

Trotskyists) were sent into the Teamsters union to begin feeling out a drive to unionize coal during the winter of 1930/31—years before the union drive actually began (p. 47). Nor was the decision to go into coal an accident: "The campaign was opened in that particular industry for specific reasons. Communist League
members were employed there; the coal yards were the strategic-place to start the action because of. The sub-zero Minnesota winters (p .42). The lesson of Minneapolis is the exact opposite of your advice. The comrades planned and industrialized in a target industry.

When you tell us that the whole notion of planning is "unreal," we have a hard time taking you seriously. It sounds to us like you're talking yourself into a corner. No matter what the size of a revolutionary organization, serious planning is an absolute necessity. To be sure, no one can make eyen general projections with perfect accuracy. But a central part of revolutionary leadership is the ability to project likely developments in the class struggle, to develop a perspective on how to take advantage of these developments, and to suggest tactics that will produce desired results.

Sometimes initiatives don't pay off. That was our experience with our auto contract campaign. But our organization is pretty unanimous that given what we knew when we launched the campaign, we were basically correct in doing so, and would again.

But the ISGB also has experience with projections that don't pan out. You campaigned for the election of Labour government saying that this would improve the conditions under which the class struggle would be carried out. It didn't work that way—at least not in the short run.

For the past two years, you have has a hard time explaining to your membership why the working class was passive, how long it was likely to remain passive, and what exactly was happening in the British economy. You time and again declared the end of the "bad period," and you lost another block of members every time the declaration proved hollow.

We don't claim to a better understanding of what your perspective should have been during that period. But at least we didn't intervene with cheap shots, frivolous and impressionistic criticisms, and the warning of splits and internal dissention unless you heeded our advice.

"Triumphalism"

This brings us to your charge against us of "triumphalism." On first reading, this charge, though grossly exaggerated, seems to be based on a legitimate insight. Even before we received your letter, many ISUS members had begun to criticize a tendency in our leadership to exaggerate successes, and play down defeat—a tendency that had become exaggerated and had begun to undermine the credibility of our leadership. Even before receiving your letter, our leadership took note of this problem and began taking steps to correct it. No doubt, even as far away as London, the word was out that this was a topic of conversation inside the !SUS. And so one would expect that your charge of triumphalism, upon reaching the States, should find fertile Soil.

On closer examination, however your charge .of triumphalism reveals itself as a smoke screen. Its purpose is not to convince us that we must be more honest and modest, but rather, you use this charge as an opening-wedge in your effort to convince us that we never have led workers, that we can't lead workers, and that we shouldn't really even try. Before following this up in detail, however we must respond to the charge that we deliberately withhold the truth from our membership.

If you had accepted the invitation to send an observer to ·our 1976 Convention, you would have been present for the report on the state of the organization. By any standards, it was both sober and honest. In front of almost 300 members and sympathizers of the ISUS, a National Secretary's report was presented that itemized and analyzed in considerable detail the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. It presented both our successes over the preceding year in fulfilling our targets, and in many areas, our lack of success. It reported exact figures on the size of the organization and breakdowms by race, by sex, by membership in various unions etc.
It has been years since the ISGB has provided a similar accounting, or opened its convention to its membership—and this despite the fact that state repression and intervention against the revolutionary Left is far higher in the us than in Britain.

You use the charge of "triumphalism" to dispute the successes of our work in the Teamster union. These successes represent the single most tangible *fact* that disproves your whole case against us.

By charging "triumphalism" you try to turn this fact into a fantasy hatched by the ISUS leadership to deceive our membership. In doing this, you reveal an

amazingly high level of ignorance about both the US labor movement, and about the actual work of the ISUS. You will have to learn to stop taking the conditions that face you in Britain, and superimposing them on other countries without any serious study of the actual situation that exists in those countries.

Because the ISGB has yet to lead a "mass workers movement" does not mean automatically that its much smaller, weaker, and less mature fraternal organization in the US can not have done that around the Teamster contract.

The union involved was totally corrupt and absolutely divorced from its rank and file. Jimmy Hoffa, past President of the Teamsters, and only credible contender against the top union machine was murdered just before our campaign began, and most of the union membership believed union President Fitzsimmons gave the order. There is no mass social democratic consciousness among the workers, nor a Communist Party at all active in the arena. And the American garden variety trade union reformist usually refrains from raising their head in this union for fear it will be blown off.

In short, we didn't face a British situation in the Teamsters Union, we faced an "American" situation—a situation in which the vacuum on the Left is much greater than anything you have every experienced or even thought about.

You "prove" that we cannot possibly be a force in the Teamster Union, because we had influence over only one delegate at the entire convention. If you understood the Teamster Union and Teamster Conventions, you would not make such a glib statement. Out of thousands of convention seats, there are only a handful nationwide that rank and file members can run for—or that the ranks get even to vote on. Most delegates are full time officials earning $20,000 to $200,000 annual pay range. The delegate in question ran in one of the most powerful Local's in the country (Hoffa and Fitzsimmons home local). He out-polled the sone of the National Teamster President. He leads Teamster for a Democratic Union, the first ongoing opposition in the largest union in the world, that recently had its own convention with 200 teamsters from IS states participating. He is quoted frequently by the press and TV as a national leader of "Dissident Teamsters."He returned from the Union Convention with a black eye and bruised ribs, testimony to his effectiveness there as an articulate spokesman of the rank and file.

This delegate was not an industrialized IS member. He is a worker leader we first met during the contract movement. The Teamster union president felt called on to attack *Worker's Power* by name in his keynote speech to the convention, and then later felt the need to send letters to every one of the 2 million union members in which he explained he did not mean to equate the rank and file with the "commies." The union has taken out paid full page advertisements in mass circulation papers in which TDU and the IS are attacked by name. It bused in over 200 supporters to picket the TDU convention with signs like: "TDU is Socialist lies."

Contrary to what you say, we are a force in the union. We are not a large force. The movement we lead is still quite fragile. Work in such a huge, powerful, corrupt, violence prone union is very difficult for an organization with our slender resources. But we do have an impact on the union and we are beginning to recruit Teamsters. We are proud of the magnificent work our members, particularly our industrialized members have done to make this possible.

We have spelled this example out in detail, because without a concrete understanding of the situation we face, you can not possibly give us useful advice. In fact comrades, if we followed your example, and offer "candid but fraternal" criticisms based on frivolous impressions and a superficial understanding of your situation, we could well end up mistakenly criticizing as "triumphalist" your announcement of the foundation of the party.

We know, after all, that this announcement takes place against a background of a loss of one-third of your members between early 1974 and 1976, disintegration of virtually all of your factory branches in the same period, and an equally serious decline in industrial rank and file work, particularly in the blue collar unions. It takes place at a time when British workers are still relatively passive in the face of massive ruling class attacks. It would be simple to charge that you are now on a "triumphalist" course.

But, for us to make such a charge would be mistaken and frivolous. We understand that your recent "right to work" and "anti-racist" campaigns represent solid success for your organization in what is still a difficult period. These are important gains, even though they are not providing a solid base where it is most needed. However we agree with point 5 of your CC statement on the party, that it is: "Important to grasp our opportunities: to understand the need for bold initiatives in appropriate circumstances." It is

proper, and not "triumphalist" to build on successes and lead from strength.

Sectarianism:

We want to warn you that in your relations with us, with the PRP, and your international dealings generally you are developing a dangerous sectarian method. In general, this method is not consistent with your practice at home. It does disservice to the development of an international movement, and unless reversed, will eventually return to haunt you at home.

For example, you warn us against cooperation with non-revolutionary forces inside the unions. By merely repeating the well known fact that revolutionaries need their own base, you imply that we are on the way toward becoming "attorney's" for some left bureaucrats for activities aimed at winning a base of our own. You make these charges without pointing to even a shred of evidence to back them up. This approach is sectarian phrase mongering of the most [space is blank] kind.

In Britain, you show more sense than to operate on the advice you give us. In the engineering industry, you cooperated with the bureaucrats of the "broad left." You did this in the process of building your own base, and did not wait until your base was already in place. The same is true now of our work in the United Steel Workers Union. We are active in the Sadlowski campaign on this basis: not as uncritical supporters of union reformism, but also not as mindless sectarians eager to find every possible excuse for separating ourselves from a campaign that is stirring the rank and file and polarizing the union in a very healthy way. Do you really believe we are incorrect?

Your most serious and dangerous sectarianism is in regard to the Portuguese revolution. Our detailed rebuttal of your position is already in your hands and in the hands of our members. We will not repeat it here. But we do want to challenge your sneering reference to the fact that we have stated publicly that there are lessons to be learned from the PRP.

Our Portuguese comrades are active in a situation that is far in advance of what you or we face. This is not a time to indulge in a sterile and abstract debate on the history of party building. Nor is it a time to withdraw, through inaction, support and encouragement from the most promising revolutionary situation of our generation. It is our historic opportunity to learn, in the flesh, from a living proletarian revolution as it unfolds, it is our duty to raise the question of party building to the level of contemporary reality of that living revolution.

The PRP has much to teachabout raising revolutionary politics in the working class and about how a small revolutionary party uses the tactics of the united front to develop strength and credibility to challenge the Communist Party whose hold over the workers has to be broken before the revolution can be carried through. Those are the major lessons. But there are scores of minor ones.

One lesson of particular relevance is the role of white collar workers. While organizations like the MES (a centrist swamp about which you have periodically harbored groundless illusions) were busy concentrating on the white-collar sectors, the PRP was concentrating on building a serious industrial working-class base. In the crisis that developed after Nov. 25th, the MES disappeared as an effective force, and the PRP continued its development. In part this flowed from differences in politics—one revolutionary and the other centrist. But it also flowed from the fact that industrial workers and white-collar workers responded to the crisis quite differently. Whie collar sectors overwhelmingly reflected the panic, disorientation, and defeatism that swept the left petty bourgeoisie. In the blue-collar sector, there was much more of a tendency to entrench. Ne can learn these and many other important lessons only by rejecting categorically your advice that the only lessons to be learned from the PRP are "lessons on occillating between ultra-leftism and opportunism."

Over the last year you have been consistently poor in your efforts at conducting international relations. This is unfortunate. Had you approached your interventions in a less high-handed manner, had you studied seriously what was actually going on, and had you based your advice on the concreteness of the situation, there is no doubt that with your great experience, you could have played a very positive role. Instead, we fear you may end up turning sectarianism into a method.

In the international perspectives produced for your own members, you seriously understate the problem. You say: "Last year showed us that it is much more difficult than we originally thought to influence organizations that have established traditions and leaderships." How did you learn this? Through your vain attempt to start a faction fight in the PRP? Through your intervention in the ISUS? Through

your fervent belief that you can learn nothing from anyone else? If this method continues to characterize your international work, you will find that it will get more difficult to influence other organizations, not less.

GIVE A CONSTRUCTIVE LEAD

We appeal to you to change your course. We belong jointly the most healthy of all international political tendencies, and only you can lead it. We cannot sit back and watch you fritter away opportunities that are now presented. You must begin to take yourselves as seriously as we take you as international leaders.

We believe that your errors flow from a "shoot from the hip" approach based on generalities and abstractions. When you send out a responsible leading comrade to directly check out the situation, you get a different answer. For example, your last document communicated to us on our strategy was done under the name of Steve Jeffries in 1973. It applauds the policy of industrialization, pointing out that the arguments against it for Britain are not valid for the USA. It states that, "not surprisingly these industrialized comrades are among the most politically advanced in the organization." It also states, "ISGB can also learn and benefit from the ISUS. Their size has forced them to establish industrial and political priorities in a much more precise way than we do." If you again sent out a responsible observer to the States, with the responsibility to honestly investigate, he or she would again return with the same conclusions.

We reject the advice you give use for it clearly points us in a direction that is wrong. It seeks to convince us to stop planning and prioritizing our work. To withdraw industrialized members from basic industry, to shift our union emphasis to white-collar unions, to replace our agitational thrust with a propagandistic orientation, to stand aloof from non-revolutionary elements in the unions and to give up the idea that we can give a concrete lead to workers. It is a program that represents defeat and demoralization in the effort ot build an industrial based revolutionary working-class organization…that represents an orientation back to the petit-bourgeoisie.

You have already pushed our Canadian comrades onto this course. When these documents are published there may emerge a handful of members in our organization who are also sympathetic to the course you chart. But we predict that none but the most demoralized will be yet ready to take responsibility for your program in the extreme form represented by your letter and the direction you have charted for the Canadian IS.

Finally, despite the conflict we are now having, we believe our fraternal collaboration with the ISGB is one of our greatest assets. Sharp disagreements on questions secondary to the principles of our joint tendency should not interfere with this collaboration. We hope that in line with our own practice, you will make these exchanges open to your membership, Rather than come between our two organizations, we would like this debate to help all members, on both sides of the Atlantic, get a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their fraternal organizations.

You tell us to profit from your mistakes. We have. And we have profited even more from your impressive successes. If you allow, we will continue to do so. We are 100% committed to do everything in our power not only to maintain our fraternal ties with the ISGB, but to expand them.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE
INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS (USA)

The New Course for the IS, December 8, 1976

The Left Faction

Dear Comrades,

We are submitting this document to the organization today because we believe the IS is in a deep crisis. The organization's perspectives have failed. The organization's politics and policies are shifting to the right. Good comrades are quitting. There is widespread demoralization. We cannot afford to wait until the convention. To do so would be irresponsible.

We want and demand all the democratic rights that are entitled to a faction in a revolutionary Marxist organization—the fundamental right to put forward and fight for our perspectives. The right to use the internal publications of the organization. The right to use the equipment of the organization. We have a right to a share of the financial resources, just as the supporters of the "Build a Workers' Leadership" at last summer's
convention had theirs. We ask that all branches discuss this document. We will be happy to send speakers to any branch. We will insist that all the issues be fully discussed, including the Sadlowski campaign, which is central to the debate on "mass work." We will also insist that the entire membership be involved in the debate and in its resolution. In particular, we do not believe an NC debate to be sufficient, nor do we consider the present NC to be particularly representative.

We have organized the Left Faction because we believe only a full and organized discussion can lead to a successful conclusion. Any other course wou1d only have made a real debate less likely. Already, the EC is attempting to severely limit the debate—now to a little more than a month's time (January 30), and excluding the issue of the Sadlowski campaign. We will not accept these limitations. To do so would also be irresponsible. We ask all the members of the IS to read our document, to discuss it with us, and to join us. We are attaching a partial list of endorsers.

In struggle,
The Left Faction

THE LEFT FACTION

Atlanta
Belinda H.
Todd J,

Bloomington
Bruce B.
Milt F,
Tim P.

Chicago
Johnny s.
Ron W.

Cincinnati
Anna P.
Bill R.
Deborah R.
Ellen D.
Ed W.
Judy N.
Michael L.
Tom H.

Cleveland
Anne M.
Betsey L.
Celia P.
Dan P.
Doug P.

Detroit
Barbara W.
Cal W.
Jenny V.
Patricia G.

Gary
Ben B.
Maggie M.
Nadie S.
Pat W.
Sharon P.
Sandy G.
Tom S.

Indianapolis
Clem W.
Jim N.
John T.
Kathy W.

Los Angeles

David L.

Louisville
Christina B.
Boni B
Fred H.
John E.
Sue B.

Madison
Bob G.

Portland
David H.
David S.
Gloria P.
Jackie S.
John M.
John R.
Steve P.

Seattle
Diane E.
Donna B.
Gretchen E.
John W.
Judy F.
Mike G.
Scott W.
Sheila N.
Shelly C.
Steve L.

INTRODUCTION

Today, there is every reason for revolutionary socialists to be confident. Internationally, the working class continues to move to the center of the stage—in Portugal, increasingly in Spain, now in Southern Africa.

In the United States, the crisis of capitalism has developed more slowly, nevertheless it continues daily to erode the confidence of the American people. Every day capitalism is less viable for the working class and the poor, and the question of an alternative system is pushed to the fore.

The key to this period is still, of course, to be found in the post-war boom, in particular in the role played by arms expenditures, and in the contradictions which are bringing the period to an end. The business cycle has returned, and for the first time in a generation, there is the prospect of long-term stagnation and decline in the American economy. The immediate future promises only weaker booms, followed by deeper recessions. Today, even in the midst of a "boom," there is talk of a "recession within the boom." At the same time, there are predictions of a new world recession within the next two years.

Still, the United States remains by far the richest and most powerful nation with thick layers of fat. In fact, its position in relation to its competitors has been strengthened in
the past five years. This has been accomplished by devaluation, by a massive productivity drive, by reducing the real wages and living standards of American workers, by slashing public expenditures (services), and by maintaining, according to AFL-CIO figures, unemployment above 10%.

This "solution" has had its price, however. Today, the decline in the living standards of American workers, together with the crisis in the cities and public services, and also with
the legacy of Viet Nam and Watergate, has left a vast disillusion in the economic and political system. Apathy, of course, still reigns, but today even apathy is being shaken.

We have always known that American workers would fight back, and indeed they have. Still, we recognize that the present strength of American capitalism is in part related to the weakness of the workers' resistance. Beginning with Nixon's wage freeze, including the last two years productivity drives and the vicious attacks on city workers, the ruling class offensive has largely been successful. Where there has been resistance, it has been fragmented, isolated, uneven. Certainly, with the exception of the miners, there has been no consistent response, no pattern. There have been fewer strikes this year than last.

Nevertheless, there have been struggles, including fantastic explosions of working class militancy—in the miners' wildcats, in the truckers' blockades, and in the San Francisco city workers general strike. There was the long, bitter rubber workers strike. IS members were involved in strikes in the carhaulers, in freight and in UPS. And increasingly, there are strikes by teachers, nurses, hospital workers. Working class resistance is developing more slowly than we might like, but it is there.

The problem is this: While there is great potential, the IS is not able to take advantage. At a time when our ideas ought to be more relevant than ever before, when there are real openings in which socialists can intervene, the IS is declining and thoroughly

demoralized. The majority of the membership has little confidence in either the organization or its perspectives. The newspaper, *Workers' Power*, is hardly sold. There has been a sharp decline in the political level of the group. Internally, the IS is wracked with dissension, including strong conservative tendencies. Needless to say, the possibilities pass us by.

THE "TURN"

Promises…

"A political party's attitude towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it fulfills *in practice* its obligations towards its class and the *working people*. Frankly acknowledging a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analyzing the conditions that have led up to it, and thrashing out the means of its rectification—that is the hallmark of a serious party; that is how it should perform its duties, and how it should educate and train its *class*, and then the *masses*. (Lenin, *"Left-Wing" Communism*, emphasis in original).

To understand the situation in the IS today, it is necessary to look back to the original perspectives of the organization, in this case the resolutions and proposals planned tor and passed by the 1975 convention. G1enn Wolfe, one of the architects of the "Turn to Agitation," as well as the "Bolshevization of the IS" has reminded us, "We got to where we are because we had a conscious strategy of using our limited resources in
a consistent way, at the points where revolutionary politics could have the greatest effect on *the working class as a whole*, in auto, steel, mines, communications, and transport." (ISJ #88, emphasis added).

This conscious strategy was summarized in the IS pamphlet, *The Struggle for Workers' Power* (Detroit, 1975) which spelled out the perspectives of the IS, in particular in the 1976-1977 bargaining round.

> It is in this three-year period that we will become a workers' Combat group in the lead of a growing rank and file movement, or be set back severely.
>
> The core group of the new revolutionary working class political leaders will have to be recruited to the IS during this period and be rapidly prepared to assume political roles.
>
> By three years from now we want them [the workers] to be the leadership of the IS, a working class and black leadership, which has already started the process of constructing factory branches.
>
> We want to double our membership by the next convention [1976]. In the next 2 years, we want to have the core of a party—worker cadres, factory branches, national rank and file movements, a weekly paper, a theoretical journal, a strong youth group, and a working class and black leadership.

…And Results

The results, unfortunately, have been somewhat different. In auto, in particular in Detroit, where the IS has concentrated its resources, both human and material, for some six years now, there was this year an unqualified defeat. According to the new "Draft National Auto Fraction Perspective," (October 27, 1976), "We recruited and held no one from the plants in the past nine months. In the same period we lost a number of members. And:
"The extremely low returns for huge amounts of work in the contract campaign has resulted in large-scale feeling of burnout and demoralization in the fraction."

In CWA, another priority of the IS for the past six years, there is even a question as to whether there can be any contract campaign in 1977. A letter to "dissident" local union presidents proposing joint activity on the contract received not a single response. Membership in the fraction has declined, and there is deep demoralization and confusion among those who carry on.

In the steelworkers, the IS is in the midst of a campaign of "unconditional" support for Ed Sadlowski, a leftish bureaucrat from Chicago. Independent rank and file activity has been "dissolved" into this campaign, and with no forces of our own, we have become "the best fighters, the best organizers" for Sadlowski. There is dissension in the fraction.

The West Virginia UMW perspective was abandoned altogether.

One Success

There has been, on the other hand, one success: the Teamster work. This included playing a part in forcing the national freight strike, the UPS strikes,

and the building of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), a small, but very promising rank and file organization. I.S. members also edit the two influential rank and file Teamster newspapers, *Convoy* and *UPSurge*. Several Teamsters joined the I.S.

There are problems here as well, however. In the words of one N.C. member, referring to the freight campaign, "Another success like this will kill us." There is of course more than an ounce of truth in this. The Teamster campaign contributed, as the national leadership itself has said itself, to the "liquidation" of the I.S. for a prolonged period of time. It contributed to the actual loss of many members, members not directly involved in the Teamsters, including the vast majority of new worker members recruited in the preceeding years recruitment campaign. It contributed to the decline of Workers' Power, both politically and in circulation. Finally, it left the organization exhausted, demoralized, and isolated, after its "greatest success."

There was a greater problem as well, for it was during the course of this campaign that the I.S. began to lose its political perspectives. "Mass work" and "Transitional Politics"
were discovered as the "lessons of the TDC." The conservative opposition of the 1976 convention also based itself on the "lessons of the TDC."

The Teamster campaigns were also, of course, real successes in the trade union movement, and there has been a great deal of discussion of this. Today, however, it is more important to realistically evaluate even the Teamster work, especially as it is sometimes said in the organization that TDU represents the "greatest achievement in the American labor movement in thirty years." Surely, this is not true, and in fact it is a claim just as dangerous as earlier projections that 1976 would be the IS's "Minneapolis" and that the TDC had "chapters in almost 50 cities…is a force in hundreds of union branches and…has a weekly paper with a circulation of over 30,000." (GW ISJ 88)

Lenin said, "tell the truth to the workers" and this must hold for successes as well as failures.

Finally, it should also be added that in this period covered by the EC 's "2-year Perspective" the IS has abandoned its Philadelphia and Sacramento branches, and it is possible that other branches may yet be lost. At the same time, and connected with these perspectives, IS internal life has become increasingly nightmarish with branch after branch torn apart in internal conflict, terminated only by the shuffling and reshuffling of members, and, of course, "discipline." More and more the organization takes on the characteristics of a "sect" in its isolated existence, its frenzied activity, its endless internal meetings, its big talk, to no listeners.

A NEW COURSE

In short, then, the perspectives of the I. S. have failed. The promises of the I. S. leadership have proved false, despite the claims that "we were right" on everything, and the assurances that '"we would do it all again." The I. S. today, far from being a "workers' combat organization," is a middle class sect drifting to the right.

Consequently, it is time for a new course, a left course. We call ourselves the Left Faction, not out of posturing (we come from all sides of previous debates), but because the present leadership is steering the I. S. dangerously to the right. We remain committed to building a rank and file movement, independent of the trade union bureaucracy and the state, and a genuine revolutionary workers organization—an organization with an uncompromising commitment to the struggles of the oppressed & blacks, women, the minorities. This organization will be built on the self-activity of the working-class itself, not on the grand schemes and illusions of the present leadership or any other.

The road ahead will not be smooth and there is no point in making big promises. As Marx told revolutionaries who flattered German workers in his time: "While we say to the workers: you have 15 or 20 years of bourgeois and national wars to go through, not merely to alter conditions, but to alter yourselves and make yourselves fit to take political power, you tell them on the contrary that they must take over political power at once or abandon all hope." We are very small. We still face the long haul. We can only begin by facing reality.

"Mass Work" is now the name for all our work. It is the I. S. strategy for everything from the Sadlowski campaign in the steelworkers, to the campaign protesting leaking roofs at Chevy Gear and Axle. It is also "our method" in the Gary Tyler work. It can mean anything, and everything.

On the surface, of course, the concept "mass work" is ridiculous. Where, after all, are the masses? Still, we should look at the actual practice, and since it is not possible to deal with every campaign, we will begin with just two; auto and steel.

Auto

Here is the auto fraction's evaluation of the Coalition for a Good Contract (CGC) and its work in the period of the 1976 auto contract negotiations (quotes from "Evaluation of
Campaign Around the Auto Contract," Auto Fraction Steering Committee, Sept. 30, 1976):

> The CGC was the right way to go, not only because it reflected our... mass work strategy which we know to be right in theory and proven in practice. But it also fitted the particular industry…
>
> We have sustained a net loss: in members and the ones we still have are understandably demoralized. That we have not lost more is a tribute to the toughness of our basic cadre in the auto industry.
>
> We are firmly convinced that it was correct to try a major initiative around this contract and that the CGC was the right form for that initiative. If we are starting over there are obvious mistakes we would not make again, but the essence of our intervention would be the same...

Forgetting for the moment the double talk "which we know to be right in theory and proven in practice," this evaluation might be just another obituary for Detroit auto work, with mass work for the IS printer, and no rewards.

Nevertheless, there was a difference this year, and "mass work" was that difference. When the National Secretary announced at the auto fraction during the National Convention that the IS might find itself supporting Doug Fraser, many members were shocked. Doug Fraser, an International Vice President of the UAW, was the very man who led the union goon squad against rank and file wildcat strikers at Detroit's Jefferson Assembly and Mack Avenue Chrysler plants.

The IS is not yet campaigning for Doug Fraser. However, it promoted Bob Weissman, the President of UAW Local 122 at Chrysler's Twinsburg, Ohio, stamping plant. Weissman is a longtime activist in Local 122, though he has not worked in the plant in 20 years. He is also active in Cleveland city politics. Recently, he was Republican Mayor Ralph Perk's chief labor advisor. (Perk is a racist and a reactionary who, among other things, led the anti-abortion forces at last summer's Republican Convention.)

The IS pushed Weissman as a leader of the CGC, and paid for and organized the CGC Detroit rally, which featured Weissman just before the contract expired. (There were no IS speakers at the meeting.)

Workers Power recently featured without comment an interview with Weissman Nov. 8, 1976), in which he bragged that, "A strike at our plant would shut the corporation down within a week." When there actually was a strike at the Twinsburg plant, led apparently by a number of young workers infuriated by the Chrysler settlement, Weissman's talk was somewhat different. He joined with the company to break the strike, and publicly denounced the strikers, promising he'd see to it that they didn't get their jobs back.

This certainly is "getting our hands dirty." (Interim Perspectives, EC, April 16, 1976). No doubt rank and file IS members worked hard to get production workers involved in the CGC. The fact is, however, that "mass work" in the UAW this year meant discarding "class struggle unionism" with a vengeance, promoting types like Weissman, and also tagging after almost every opportunist that moved, including UAW officials Runnels and
Oginski, who twice last summer paraded retirees outside UAW meetings in downtown Detroit (and received glowing coverage in Workers' Power). These opportunists would. never dare mobilize production workers.

Steel

Today the IS is campaigning for Ed Sadlowski, the reform candidate for International President of the United Steel Workers. IS members now staff offices, hand out leaflets, organize dances and attend smorgasbords, all to prove themselves hard-working, practical campaign workers—the precondition, it is said, for political influence which is hoped to follow.

At the same time, it is IS policy "in each mill…to fold our existing work into the Fight Back movement" (Steel perspectives). That is "mass work" terminology for dissolving the existing rank and file organizations into Sadlowski's official campaign—the Fight Back. We have even gone so far as to condemn the Communist Party as "sectarian" because they will not disband their steel workers newspaper. In this case, then, "mass work" puts us somewhere to the right of the Communist Party. Finally, women steel workers are now told that

the best thing they can do for themselves "as women" is to support Sadlowski, and that an independent women's group, for example, would not do.

Sadlowski, of course, is far better than his opponent, Lloyd McBride, and far better than the current President I. W. Abel, the author of the union's no-strike pledge (the ENA). And he deserves support, though hardly "unconditional support," not the praise *Workers' Power* lavishes on him. He is still a bureaucrat, though a reforming, left one. His faults are not simply, as *Workers Power* would have us believe, that he is "vague, cautious," and has a shortage of "boldness and daring" (WP, Nov. 29, 1976). Sadlowski is by no means a Debs, nor is he a "class struggle unionist." When steel workers at Danly Machine in Chicago were on strike for thirteen weeks, there were many militant battles on the picket lines. Ed Sadlowski, however, their District Director, never once visited the lines.

Orientation to the Left Bureaucracy

"Mass Work," then, has become the name for the IS's orientation to opportunists and reformers in the trade union bureaucracy. In the CWA, so far, the local union presidents have not nibbled at the IS proposal for joint work around the next contract. In the Teamsters, there has been a longstanding commitment to building an independent rank and file organization, and the TDU at this point promotes no bureaucrats. Still, given
"mass work," there is the worry that when the inevitable Arnold Miller or Ed Sadlowski of the Teamsters comes along, there may be a proposal to "fold" the TDU into that campaign.

MILITANT MINORITY

> What characterizes mass work is that on the issues we seek support from the mass of the workers involved, not just from a self-defined radicalized or militant minority…
>
> In mass work on shop and economic issues, we try to give a lead to the backward, reactionary, and cowardly workers as well as to the militants. (""Mass Work, Politics, Building the Party" EC document.)

Revolutionaries, of course, fight on partial and immediate demands. There is no place for purism, nor for abstentionism. Revolutionaries are also not program polishers, either of the 1938 Transitional Program variety, or of the "Principles of Class Struggle Unionism." Workers become revolutionaries in struggle, including of course the struggle over ideas.

The question, therefore, is really one of strategy and orientation. In the 1976 Detroit freight wildcat, a small, militant minority of Teamsters kept the strike going tor three
days after Frank Fitzsimmons ordered the members back to work. In the central states UPS strike, again, it was a small, militant minority that kept the pickets up an extra day in the wildcat that hit eight cities. Today, the TDU represents a small, politically conscious, militant minority of the 2 million strong Teamsters union.

Our orientation must be to that minority. Furthermore, there are great dangers in supposing that revolutionaries will lead the "reactionaries, including the racists and the sexists." It is the danger that the revolutionaries will be forced to accommodate to the "reactionaries" they must try to win. Already, we have seen that it is very difficult to get a plank supporting the United Farmworkers into the TDU program. Already, the IS has insisted that there can be no special demands for blacks and women in the "broad, mass campaigns" that it organizes.

The hard truth is that the IS cannot have it all ways. It cannot, at the same time, orient to the left bureaucracy, and to the "cowards and reactionaries" in the rank and file, and also to the militant minority, in particular to the special demands and struggles of the oppressed." There remains, of course, a rhetorical commitment to blacks and women, but it is the "mass work" perspective itself, and. not the intentions of its authors, that leads to abandoning in fact the orientation to blacks in industry, and that makes "mass work" a disaster for the fight for women's liberation in industry.

The fact is also that IS members cannot be the "best fighters, the best leaders," etc., without reflecting the politics of the class. If the class is conservative, the leaders quite naturally will reflect that conservatism. Whether we like it or not, the masses of workers in the United States today are quite conservative, in particular, they are filled with chauvinism, racism, sexism, patriotism. There is also of course a minority which is the opposite. The "mass work" approach however, orients to the former and strengthens the conservative tendencies already strong in our industrial work.

PRIORITIES

> ‘‘Substitutionism is the greatest danger which faces a small revolutionary group.” —Tony Cliff

There is a degree to which “mass work” is the logical conclusion of priorities. Both strategies are based fundamentally on the idea that revolutionaries can ignore the real facts of the world—the level of consciousness of the workers, the actual balance of forces in the particular plants, shops, and unions—in short, the objective conditions. In both strategies, the will of the revolutionaries (voluntarism) is substituted for the real
struggles of the workers.

It is claimed, for example, that the present condition of the IS is not due to the politics or the perspectives of the EC:

> The flaws that are now revealed in our industrial mass work are not due to a failure of the mass work strategy, thought it still has some weaknesses, or simply to more difficult conditions resulting from the success of the employers offensive. Nor are they due to differences in the combativity at this time of workers in different industries because of specific differences in work force contracts, unions, conditions, etc. They are related to the fact that the IS political cadre is too small to lead the next steps forward…” (Campaign to Build a Political Periphery, EC, September 14, 1976, emphasis added)

The objective conditions don’t count for much, thus it becomes the fault or shortcomings of the members; a voluntarist load that has crushed many fine comrades.

Similarly, the CGC was “the right way to go,” it fitted the particular industry.” and we would do it again. Why then, did the CGC fail? Perhaps it was the workers’ fault. Or possibly if we had just had a few people in Ford…

What the Priorities Argument is Not About

At the beginning, something should be said about what the priorities argument is not about. Of course, all organizations have their priorities. So do branches, fractions, even individual members. And the priorities are mainly determined by various factors—objective conditions, resources, openings for actual intervention and work. In 1973, for example, the British IS embarked upon a campaign to build factory branches, and there was in fact a policy by which other work was subordinated to that campaign. Never, however were students told to leave the campuses to build factory braches, nor were white collar workers advised to get into the “priority” plants. And in summer, 1976, building factory branches was not a priority, not because of any abstract position on factory branches, but because of the objective conditions. There have also however been periods when recruiting students was a priority of the British IS. The Coventry branch
has always made *Socialist Worker* sales and, whenever possible, agitation at Chrysler a priority. In. Gary, Ind., steel will probably always be a priority for revolutionaries. In Danville, Va., coal mining.

Basic Industry

At the same time, all Marxists understand the importance of the factories and of basic industry. That is where capital is the most concentrated. That is where the workers are forced together, to work and work together in large numbers. It. is also understood that on the day of the revolution, the “big battalions” had better be on the barricade— the auto workers, the steel workers, the coal miners and truck drivers.

The argument is not with the principle of revolutionaries that “every factory must be our fortress.” Nor is it with the fact that industrial workers must be the key to building a successful revolutionary workers’ party. So it is stupid to attempt to reduce the question to one of white collar vs. blue collar or workers vs. students. The argument concerns the
question of how to build a proletarian party, not whether a proletarian party is desired.

Unrealistic Priorities

The argument is also not that Detroit IS should ignore the auto plants and workers who dominate the city’s workforce. Rather, it is that the present IS strategy makes it impossible for New York IS to relate to city workers, and forgets the fact that New York City has no auto at all, and relatively little basic industry. The problem is also that the IS strategy of priorities makes it impossible for Louisville IS to relate to a teachers’ strike. Boston IS must ignore students. Women IS members cannot relate to the struggles of’ women workers. The IS as an organization could not relate to the rubber workers strike. The problem is that the IS strategy of priorities creates a rigid organization with increasingly narrow perspectives.

No Grand Schemes

> In Connolly's words, "The only true prophets are those who carve out the future they announce." At the same time, mindless adoption of "Bolshevik" solutions that fitted a genuinely revolutionary situation would be fatal, not because of any desire of Marxists to avoid questions of the seizure of state power, but because we work with the movement as it is and not as it might be.
>
> "The richest source for the development of Marxist theory is the experience of the working class; to impose grand conceptions on a movement that is fragmented and very narrow in its contemporary focus is both to miss the opportunity for the recreation of theory and in practice to become isolated and sectarian." (Colin Barker, "The British Labour Movement, ISJ 61)

The American working class is no more monolithic than the British, the Portuguese, or whatever. The path to socialism cannot be charted or "planned." Today there is very little "consistency" in the class struggle. American workers struggle, but their struggles are fragmented and sporadic. Certainly, there is no way that a group of 300 can either chart the course of the class struggle, nor can it expect to impose "consistency" on history. A glance at working class history shows that the great explosions are rarely predicted. The women began the Russian Revolution. Portuguese teachers were the first ones out in the latest resurgence of Portuguese workers. Coal miners in the United States today are the most anti-communist workers. The first ones today will later be the last. All the planning of the IS EC, all its expert deliberations, were not sufficient to predict that the 1976 auto strike would be at Ford, and consequently, in the words of the National Secretary, when the strike at Ford began, "the IS was as useless as a third tit."

The task of revolutionaries today is to take advantage of what actually exists, to build on the real struggles of the working class, not to pretend to plan the development of the struggle by choosing the three or four priority industries. Our task in the IS today is not to replace the present priorities with new ones, whether white collar, hospitals, or whatever. We must prepare ourselves to intervene, to "give a lead," in the struggles to come including in the inevitable explosions that will come in auto.

Preparing ourselves politically and organizationally, however is not the same thing as trying to substitute ourselves for such explosions. As we have seen for some six years now, the IS has not been able to take advantage of its work in auto. The abstract fact that auto workers are potentially the vanguard of the American working class has done very little to help the Detroit IS. The district is almost always in crisis, it is '"reorganized" twice a year, with more or less the same members shuffled and reshuffled, from branch to branch, committee to committee. Still, the Detroit district is among the most isolated, the most conservative, the most apolitical district with little or no "consistent work." And this is despite the fact that Detroit has been, and remains, the priority branch.

IS branches come and go, as do the members. "Priorities" led to scrapping the Philadelphia branch, never mind the fact that it is a city of 5 million, and 600,000 blacks. There are today half a dozen or more second class (non-priority) branches. Right now, New Yorlt City is being written off once again, as if we believed there are no revolutionaries in New York's huge working class—and in capitalism's most important city.

Priorities in Priorities

The situation today might not even be quite so bad if the IS did in fact do consistent work in five major unions. But the truth is that even within the priorities, there are priorities. In the Teamsters, the priority is freight, and everything else must take a back seat. In auto, the priority is the Big Three (GM, Chrysler, Ford); in steel it is basic steel; in telephone it is plant. The IS prioritizes 95% of the working class out of its perspectives and out of playing any part in this key two and one-half year period, during which, of course, "the core group of the new revolutionary working class political leaders will have to be recruited to the IS."

The IS must say to an electrical worker in Cincinnati, "you don't fit in." It must say to Louisville's fifteen new recruits last fall, "you don't fit in." Obviously there is little room or role for a teacher or a student. And what about black youth? How are these young people to find a role in our priorities when they face 50% unemployment?

Priorities are a disaster for work among the oppressed. It should not surprise us that the IS, with few exceptions, has virtually no women contacts in its industrial work. There are few women to be found in the priorities, and the work of the women in these industries, no matter how "magnificent and heroic" (which it often has been) cannot be expected to change that objective fact.

Every Revolutionary a Priority

The advice then, of our British comrades concerning the divisions that now exist in our branches and between our branches divisions between industrialized members and non-industrialized members, between industrial branches and "backward" branches, must be seen in this context. Rather than singling out that "good quarter of our organization" etc. ' and constantly referring to those "backward elements who don't fit in, we might consider
their experience(ISGB): "In twenty-five years of our existence, we have learnt that you have to count members in hundreds and thousands before the national leadership can begin to forget that every individual revolutionary, warts and all, is a priority." (ISGB Central Committee, "Letter to ISUS NC, Oct 7, 1976)

INDUSTRIALIZATION

"No matter how talented and devoted to socialism an emigrant from the bourgeois milieu may be, before becoming a teacher, he must first go to school in the working class. Young intellectuals must not be placed at the head of intellectual youth but sent out into the provinces for a few years, into pure proletarian centers, for hard practical work." (Trotsky, "Letter to Burnham," *In Defense of Marxism*)

In 1969, the IS began the policy of industrialization, that is, of sending students and former students into industry. In the beginning, only a few actually took industrial jobs, but eventually the organization moved toward wholesale industrialization and "industrializing the organization."

The policy, at least at first was simple enough. A whole generation of revolutionaries had developed in the United States, without any connection to the working class. The IS therefore revived Trotsky's advice to Burnham, first so that IS members could gain some experience in the working class, and second so that socialist ideas could be taken back into the working class. Also hopefully, so that workers could be recruited and the actual social composition of the IS changed.

The fact was that often the best and most committed students chose to take industrial jobs, sometimes because of the frustrations of student politics, but usually because of their commitment to the working class and to transforming the IS. In many cases, this is still true today.

Reasons to Industrialize

The IS was not the only organization to industrialize—the Maoist groups did the same, as did dozens of new-left collectives. The arguments for industrialization in the IS, however, were particularly strong. In the sixties, the IS (actually the ISC) resided in Berkeley, not exactly a working class stronghold.

Its ties to the past were few, if any. The active leadership of the IS had no experience in the working class at all. There were virtually no workers in the organization. Finally, the IS did not have a useful newspaper, and neither did it have any idea of how to develop a workers' paper.

Therefore it can be said that industrialization offered certain advantages, and that it was at least symbolic of the organization's commitment to the working class.

Problems of Industrialization

Unfortunately, industrialization brought many problems as well, problems not discussed in Trotsky's letter. The middle class students who went into industry nearly always immediately faced severe problems in adjusting to the work, to the workers, and so on. Problems which could be chalked up to experience for Trotsky's youth came to dominate in the IS, for in the IS note just a few "went off to school." This IS was organized around the industrialized members.

The industrialized students also faced political problems at work. They found themselves aliens in the working class world, facing a difficult struggle just to fit in, to be accepted. Fitting in usually involved politically accommodating to the conservative politics of the majority of the workers—and, that meant putting revolutionary politics on the shelf, at least for a considerable period.

The results, for most of the students involved, were profoundly conservatizing. Above all, they needed to break out of their isolation, yet their politics seemed to make them stand out even more. Mass work, of course, helped in that it made accommodation somewhat simpler, at least politically.

Worse, instead of what Trotsky had advised as a three-year course, industrialization often became a whole personal strategy for those comrades involved.

The industrialized comrades found themselves with a role and place assured in the organization. Increasingly, they came to think of themselves not as a human link to workers, but as actual workers. And industrialization became a substitute for recruiting real workers.

The "Failures"

The very worst came when middle class members of the IS were told not only that they had to industrialize, but that they were to become mass workers' leaders as well—and overnight. There are exceptions to every rule of course, but in general, the "you can lead" syndrome guaranteed "mass" casualties. Those comrades who attempted to do the impossible—to stand out and fight, and lead the masses, were often victimized. The others more than likely "failed." No wonder. The idea that middle class students, with little or no experience, with little or no seniority, can expect to be mass leaders is simply ludicrous, and of course the IS leaves behind it a long trail of "failures."

Industrialization was also justified in the beginning by American exceptionalism, yet now it is becoming a principle of revolutionary organization. The IS BC wants to convince not only the Canadians and the Australians of its necessity, but also the Germans and the Irish. It even hints that the British IS should industrialize. The British comrades can hardly be blamed, therefore, if they believe the leadership here does in fact "live in a fantasy world."

Industrialization conservatizes the individual members, and leads to conservatism in the entire organization. It focuses the attention of the organization not on the working class, but on its own middle class members. And, in the last analysis, it has not even helped us to recruit, with the possible exception of the Teamster work. On the contrary, it may well be a factor in keeping workers away.

Whatever the advantages of industrialization in the past, industrialization today is clearly a disadvantage. No, we do not propose dragging comrades from their jobs, and there may still be many contributions to be made by industrialized members. But industrialization as a strategy must be abandoned. It is a pessimistic, conservative and substitutionist strategy.

Finally, industrialization as practiced today by the IS, or by the Maoists for that matter, has nothing in common with Trotsky's "going to school in the working class." It has become a road not to a genuine workers' organization, but instead to a petty bourgeois workerist organization.

THE REGIME

"When we open up a new area of work—for example our Free Gary Tyler campaign—we don't dabble." (EC Letter to British IS, October 15, 1976)

The IS today is a wreck. It is a schizophrenic organization, conservative in its industrial work, yet full of bluster— "We are the best fighters," "We have left the world of the sects," we are "building the party. "

Failure has followed failure, promise after promise has gone unfulfilled. Still, the leadership attempts to maintain that everything is basically sound. It 's simply a "bad period." In the meantime, "discipline" substitutes for real leadership, even though, of course, there is only the most formal and passive agreement on perspectives—in the face of "no alternative." "Discipline" and "following orders" is demanded in an admittedly "apolitical" organization.

The "machine" in Detroit substitutes for strong branches and fractions. Today, one member in ten in the IS works full time for the organization. New offices are regularly opened, new posts invented. It is all, of course, a far cry from an actual Bolshevik organization:

> The Bolshevik administrative center was the most primitive. There were only three people in the secretariat during the1905 revolution. This penny ha'penny apparatus, together with conditions of illegality and the proletarian composition of the party, made it impossible for petty-bourgeois factionalism to develop. The party member was expected to participate in determining the general line of the party and to know the specific job he himself was to do. There was no place for the intense gossip group. " (Tony Cliff, "Lenin and the Revolutionary Party " ISJ 58)

Voluntarism

The IS today is a sect, dominated by voluntarism. Consider this statement:

> A good quarter of our membership is solidly enough committed to put their whole life at the service organization. These are comrades who, at the request of the organization, will

> pull up roots, break ties with family and friends, leave well paid jobs to move to the place where we need them, work in the industry we ask them to, and live in poverty as long as required. (EC letter to the British IS, October 15,1976)

It is a description of a stereotypical sect. It has more in common with the middle-class collectives of the new left than it does with Marxist tradition. IS members are very dedicated. Comrades have moved and moved again. Comrades have taken jobs in steel and teamsters. Middle-class revolutionaries in particular should be expected to sacrifice. But none of this is the meaning of the EC's statement.

A Real Workers Organization

Today the IS needs, more than anything else, roots, stability, and continuity. It needs to break out of its isolation. It needs to recruit and integrate workers. It needs to be an organization "habitable" to workers. Can anyone really believe that today, workers will join (and stay in) an organization that expects them to "pull up roots," "break with family and friends," and "live in poverty," not to mention attend an endless series of internal—and often pointless—meetings? Most workers, of course must struggle just to stay out of poverty (or are struggling to get out of poverty). Most workers must struggle just to hold things together—including family and friends.

The EC formula has nothing to do with building a real workers organization, with developing a real workers leadership so no wonder relies instead on tokenism.

The IS in fact has recruited a small number of workers. The record of holding them and training them, however, is appalling, surely a bad sign in a period where revolutionary workers are relatively few in numbers.

Blacks

The IS has also recruited a small number of blacks. Yet, it has discouraged a genuine black leadership. Black members are dragged from city to city to speak, but they are not developed to become active leaders. Still, the IS claims the title "best fighters for black liberation." Despite our proclamations, the IS has taken on the very worst tradition of the left in its black work. It is full of rhetoric: "we will rebuild the black movement; the
merger with the Socialist Collective was " an historic occasion" and "the world will be watching us. " (EC Statement on Unity, Fall '74). Yet it does not even politically and organizationally train those few blacks who do join. The truth is that the IS has no ongoing black work; it has no black perspectives, not even for local work. It flits from issue to issue. The EC has failed to raise black liberation in any consistent way in our trade union work. The record of the leadership on black work is tokenism, opportunism, and self-congratulations.

Discipline

"Politics is 99% inspiration and 1% discipline. (Lenin)

"Discipline" today substitutes for political agreement. And there is very little inspiration. If comrades cannot be convinced, as is often the case, they are threatened—with suspension, expulsion, and "we'll destroy you." Yet everyone knows there is no democracy in the IS, and when there is a genuine controversy, the leadership attempts to suppress it; it muzzles dissenting speakers; it will not order or distribute certain materials; it "loses" correspondence, and it fails to disseminate documents submitted by its membership.

The leadership, instead of striving to build a real cadre organization—an organization in which the members are politically confident, full of initiative, and self reliance—substitutes itself in every area. It is behind nearly every slate, no matter the branch or fraction. It is involved in never ending branch reorganizations and settlements. This past summer, there were three EC members on the auto fraction steering committee, though
none of them of course worked in auto. Today on the National CWA Fraction Steering Committee there are two EC members (out of four on the committee) and no phone workers. The National Chairman boasts to have led the Central States UPS strike. No wonder, then, that the membership is increasingly alienated and passive, that it has little confidence in the perspectives of the organization, that it often cannot carry out the line of the organization in action—the place where discipline is supposed to count.

Pseudo-Bolshevism

Today's leadership offers pseudo-bolshevism. It offers semi-helpful technical leadership—the National Secretary will tell comrades when to get up in the morning—but give no political leadership. Consequently, it is inevitable that the organizers must become hacks, and that the industrialized members will feel abandoned. It is inevitable that there is

constant internal political crisis.

The Red Tide, surely one of the IS's most promising initiatives, is today becoming a caricature of the IS; steadily turning inward, burning out its leaders, exaggerating its strengths and importance, and tying itself down in bureaucratic structures—it is now a "democrat centralist, bolshevik combat youth organization." And it is expected to save the IS. Youth vanguardism, however, is just the last fig-leaf for the leadership, and if continued it will derail and destroy the Red Tide.

It all has to change.

THE WAY FORWARD

The way forward for the IS begins with facing facts. We are still a very small group. In relation to the population, we are equivalent to an organization of 75 members in Britain. The membership of the Canadian IS in relation to its working class, is larger than the IS US.

With so few forces, which include today only a tiny number of workers, and considering the objective conditions and the level of consciousness of the American working class, the IS must recognize that it is still a propaganda group. A propaganda group is an organization which must appeal to and attempt to recruit a small number of workers primarily on the basis of the whole range of its ideas—its revolutionary politics. It does not have the muscle, the weight (numbers and influence) in the working class to appeal to and recruit primarily on the basis of its agitation. The fact that many comrades supported the "turn to agitation" because they believed it would turn the organization outward, and because they had the best intentions, does not make the "turn" any less a mistake. We were wrong, and today we are paying dearly.

An Activist, Interventionist Organization

Accepting that we are a propaganda group, and realizing that we cannot by sheer willpower alone skip whole stages of development, does not mean, however, that we must return to the swampy past, to the commentary group. Today a propaganda group can and must relate its ideas to the real struggles of workers. The IS must become an activist, interventionist organization, one that aggressively pushes its politics and aggressively strives to recruit workers.

It must also be prepared to be bold and audacious, but also honest and realistic.

The truth is that we have done this before, before the "turn." Our intervention in the "March for Jobs" on April 26, 1975, in Washington, D. C. was such an intervention. It was an opening we could neither have planned nor foreseen—still we took advantage. UPSurge was similar. We came upon UPS by accident. A few comrades organized a real movement, often in spite of the priorities of the IS. We are now involved in an organizing campaign at Snow Lion, a small non-priority shop in the Bay Area. We intervened in the independent left in 1974, and grew. We intervened in the women 's movement—in action and with our ideas—in the Coalition of Labor Union Women and at the Cleveland working women's conference. And we grew.

Had we followed through on the Portugal Solidarity Campaign, politically as well as organizationally, it could have been a success. The Southern Africa Campaign has fanstastic promise, but not if it follows the patterns set in the Attica support work and in the Free Gary Tyler campaign.

Plenty to Do

There is plenty to do, and it is really priorities and industrialization which blinds us to this elementary fact. The increasing narrowness' and the rigidity of our priorities in the past year has now made it difficult for many members even to imagine any other strategy.

First of all, there is inside work. We will not abandon inside work, and the very idea is incredible. The most promising inside work is in the Teamsters union, where we have recruited a small number of workers and built real rank and file organizations. To fulfill this promise, however, we must have a healthy, politically cohesive organization—an organization which recruits in the Teamsters union and fights for clear class struggle politics in the rank and file movement—that is, for a self-reliant rank and file movement, independent of the Teamster bureaucracy, based on strong local groups and with a shop-floor orientation. The fact that the Detroit Teamster branch must for all intents and purposes be kept separate from the Detroit district is just one indication of the depth of our problem. The IS must change, for if it does not, those workers who now look to the IS, including those active in the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, will only be lost or, worse, politically ruined.

We also have inside work in steel, telephone, etc. But this work will only be successful if we can build our own base and build the IS. And there is no short-cut or substitute for this, certainly not trying to latch on to the Sadlowski's, Weissman's, and so on. The most important point is that we have the potential to do inside work in dozens of places. In hospitals, schools, on busses and in Bakeries, but this cannot be done because of priorities, and because we lack the political confidence to just do it. A strategy that says "nothing can be done" outside our priorities is very conservative indeed, and in practice it turns us away from potential inside work.

Outside Work

We must also do outside work, and there is nothing complicated or foreign about this. It does not mean that we will end up chasing every strike, although there is certainly nothing wrong with going after workers in struggle. We should do strike support work. We can sell *Workers' Power* on picket lines. We have already recruited workers in this way. Given our slim forces, we will have to do more and more outside work, but the point of outside work is to get inside work—to recruit workers to the IS.

We did this in the Postal campaign, a campaign which boosted the confidence of the IS, which built the circulation of Workers' Power, increased our working class political periphery, and which recruited to the IS. There we re problems in the postal work, but it did not depoliticize and demoralize the organization. And Postal recruitment (6 worker members) was in the same league as Teamster recruitment. The fact that not all of these workers have stayed on is more related to the general problem of the IS (which has not held the great majority of its new worker members) than it is to the problems of postal work.

There is another great advantage to outside work, and that is that while we are small the working class and the class struggle are vast. American workers will fight, and it is the task of revolutionaries to relate to and build on that struggle wherever it exists. That is what revolutionaries have always done. But it can't be done if our members are tied down through industrialization and the EC's master plan.

Workers' Power

The key to turning the organization outward, to developing both useful propaganda and carrying out successful campaigns, is transforming *Workers' Power* and then using it. We will be writing another document soon on the necessity of developing a successful, interventionist workers' newspaper. But we already know that this can be done. We have seen what a good paper is like, because there are examples in our own tendency. Still it has to be emphasized now that *Workers' Power* has to become central to the IS in every
sense, in every area of work. It cannot be put "on the back burner every time there is a little action. Quite the contrary.

Workers' Power must lead politically. It cannot continue to tail agitational work. But it will never do this as long as it is aimed at a nonexistent "mass" audience, at the lowest common denominator. It has to be directed to (and written by, sold by, and read by) the advanced workers, those in struggle, those whom we want to recruit and those whom we want to bring into our periphery. Therefore, it will have to carry useful, interesting materials, especially the reports of workers—first-hand accounts of their struggles. It must also carry the full range of our politics. And it will never be our central tool, a revolutionary, political workers' newspaper as long as it has to compete in a losing battle for attention with industrialization and our "priorities."

WP and Democratic Centralism

Workers' Power can also take us in the direction of real democratic centralism, but only if it actually carries our politics, and only if the members actually sell the paper and defend its ideas. If comrades really use Workers' Power as their main tool in campaigns arid interventions with their contacts and friends, then the paper will be our best organizer. It will centralize and unify our work and our organization where it
Counts—in the world, in action. It will do what a Leninist paper is supposed to do.

Priorities Based on Real Struggles

To turn outward, to really turn to the working class, the IS must abandon its present priorities and industrialization as its strategy for building a revolutionary Workers Party. It must turn to the actual struggles of the working class. The IS must develop local perspectives based on the actual conditions in each city and workplace.

This is not a retreat into federalism, and it is nothing new. As J. P. Cannon said, the Minneapolis Teamster campaign in the Thirties "…was not a preconceived plan worked out by the general staff of our

movement." Farrell Dobbs documents this in *Teamster Rebellion* (P 36-46). In 1933, Minneapolis was a backwater. The workers in the coal yards were hardly the most decisive section of the American working class. Local S74 was a very small union. It had only 75 members prior to the fall of
1933. But it happened that the President of the local, Bill Brown, was sympathetic to the Communist League. And the Communist League had a group of talented, experienced workers in Minneapolis. The Communist League made the coal yards a priority and then made the most of it.

Build Where We Can

Today is not 1933 or 1934. But the IS can still make use of that experience and that method. We must be prepared to intervene in small struggles, as well as large. Just as workers in the powerful unions sometimes have more confidence, so workers in the weaker sectors are often more directly confronted with the power and brutality of the state.

The IS must recruit and train a core of workers, and it must build where it can, whether it is in the backwaters or at the center. It cannot ignore or liquidate successful branches,
even if they are far away from Detroit. There are workers today who are interested in socialism, who are willing to join a revolutionary organization. They exist only in ones and twos. But they must be recruited all the same. And there is nothing outdated, discredited, or sectarian about focusing on these ones and twos. These workers, and their struggles, must become our priorities.

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Optimism, Not Pessimism

Some people will say that this is a pessimistic perspective, but it is not. It is our present perspective, which says that workers are not interested in socialism, and which says that
they can only be recruited to rank and filism, that is pessimistic and conservative.

We will be charged with wanting to go back to the books, but this too is false. We do believe, however, that politics and propaganda are important. We also agree with Lenin that without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice. We may be charged with wanting to "return to the campuses " because we have mentioned students. But only former students will say this. We are not afraid of recruiting students to the IS. And we are not against relating to the independent left, nor to the movements of the oppressed—Native Americans, Latinos, gays—and trying to recruit from them. If others are, it is only because they lack confidence in their own politics and commitment to the working class.

A healthy, outward-looking organization might actually recruit workers in more than ones and twos. And given half a chance, it would also recruit and find a role for those students, teachers, and white collar workers who are now ready and willing to join and help build a revolutionary workers' party based in industry. If in the past year each IS branch had recruited one or two workers, and held them; we would be larger today, not
smaller, and our social composition would have been dramatically improved.

Change the IS

We are talking about changing the IS and we will have to do this as a result of struggle, branch by branch, fraction by fraction, and member by member. We will be charged with terrible crimes and there will be appeals to emotionalism. This should not frighten anyone, however, for we are also talking about changing the world. The IS as it is organized today has no future. The working class does. The center of our perspective is building the IS now, with what we have and where we are. The present leadership has no strategy for the IS as it exists. And it has no strategy for the long haul. It has only get-rich-quick schemes and false promises.

Now we must fight to maintain and develop the revolutionary traditions of the IS, of our international tendency, and of the working class. In this we can rely only on ourselves, and in the capacity of the working class to struggle. No one will do the job for us. Neither will we ever be "legitimate" in the United States, not as long as capitalism exists. We will always be "outlaws."

In conclusion, then, we remain committed to building an independent rank and file movement, and a revolutionary workers' party. We remain committed to real democracy, to women's liberation, and to the fundamental importance of the struggle for black liberation.

Finally, we reaffirm that there is no alternative to the most important of all Marxist ideas—"The emancipation of the working class will be the act of the working class itself."

Two Notes on a Visit to the United States

Nigel Harris

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ONE

OLD Mrs. Jackson has given up the two miles walk to the welfare clinic. She used to go on the subway, but now it is too expensive. Then, despite her sixty-seven years, she walked. But now she says that there are so few staff at the clinic she does not get a hearing anyway, and it is too cold and slippery to walk.

There are thousands of others in New York who are similarly learning to live with the slow destruction of the minimum conditions of city life. The city officials, caught between the voters and the city's creditors, plaintively urge 'self-reliance'; the city dustmen's chief recommends householders to sweep' the gutters themselves, 'out of a sense of civic responsibility'.

New York has been the heart of American capitalism for more than 150 years. But now the heart has gone somewhere else, and in the general crisis of profitability in the whole system, New York has become victim instead of victor.

A series of processes have combined to destroy the financial basis of the city. Three of the most important are detailed below.

The Flight of Industry

FOR nearly half a century, American industry has been moving its activities away from the cities of the north-east of the country. It is now also moving away from the North-Central region (Chicago-Detroit). Business has been pursuing low costs, escaping from the high living, housing and transport cots of the old cities, and more recently, the urban riot. High technology new industry paying the highest wages has moved to the West (California) and the South (Texas).

The workers have chased the jobs. Put crudely, the relatively high income skilled whites have moved westwards and southwards, while the relatively unskilled blacks and immigrants have moved northwards from the south. A relatively declining average income in the northern cities bites deep into municipal revenue unless there is redistribution between the cities of different regions. Most of the big cities in the expanding regions have continued to increase jobs and incomes through the slump, while the cities of the north and north-east have, to a greater or lesser extent, had financial crises.

This only relates to cities. Every southern and western city has its impoverished ghetto of blacks, Mexicans, poor whites and other ethnic groups, just as the northern cities sport the leafy garden suburbs of the rich.

Nevertheless, the flight of industry changes the whole distribution of income in the north, increasing the extremes of income and making it impossible to finance, let alone rehabilitate, the old cities. Only the centralisation of the country's government so that business could not escape paying would overcome this. In more centralised countries, like Britain and Japan, the similar problems of London and Tokyo are concealed by direct government subsidies.

New York's loss of jobs has steadily grown more severe. It is concealed to some extent when the national economy booms, but is starkly exaggerated when there is a slump. Between 1969 and 1974, the city lost 340,000 jobs (or more than had been created in the preceding 15 years). It missed the national boom of 1971-3, which, if the city had expanded as the national economy did, should have brought it a quarter of a million new jobs. In the year of slump up to May 1975, another 93,000 jobs disappeared (or a quarter of a million jobs if we include the surrounding New York – north-east New Jersey area). The decline in jobs prompts people to leave the city altogether – since 1970, the city has been losing about 2½ per cent of its population every year (this is the official figure, and does not include

'illegal immigrants'). As a result of the contraction in the size of the labour force, unemployment rates have been kept down – 11.7 per cent in the middle of 1975 (as against a national average of about 8 per cent).

2. The Flight of the Rich

AT the same time as industry has been moving nationally, the rich and the middle classes have been trying to escape high city costs by moving beyond the city boundaries. The spread of car ownership is a key factor in this process. The long-run census figures show the movement over a long period – the areas of most rapid population growth at different times was as follows: 1900-1910, central city areas; 1910-1920, a five mile ring around the cities; 1920-1950, a five to ten mile ring round the cities; thereafter, beyond the ten mile radius. Indeed, most city growth since the second World War has been by extending city boundaries, not by increasing the number of people inside the old boundaries. Where cities are allowed – as New York is not – to extend their boundaries, they have come to cover an immense area. Houston in Texas now covers 503 square miles, and its suburbs, over 6000 square miles.

In the 1960s, the American suburban population increased by 30 per cent.the central cities by five per cent. The relatively poor continue to move into the central city areas, as the rich leave in even larger numbers. Those left in the cities are those who cannot escape and are politically important only when they riot. The municipal boundary – where it will not be extended – becomes the frontier between the suburban rich and city poor, between whites and blacks or 'immigrants' (the Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and others, regardless of whether they were born in the United States or not). In the case of New York, between 1945 and 1970, about two million richer people ($10,000 or more income per year) left the city, and slightly fewer poor ($6,500 or less) settled there.

The incomes of the city's residents is the base for municipal income, so that if the average falls, the corporation has to raise more taxes to keep the same revenue flowing – or extend the boundaries to recapture the rich. But this last reform is impossible while the rich continue to control the State Assembly which could alone sanction a change in boundaries. As a result, New York becomes a kind of poor house, and the financial crisis is insoluble.

The Predatory Banks

AS the tax base has shrunk because of the loss of jobs and the rich, New York municipality has become dependent on increasing taxation (which accelerates the flight of business and richer households from the city) and bank loans. In a boom, when interest rates are high, the city borrows heavily to pay the interest. In the slump, the tax base contracts, the banks become increasingly savage in recovering their loans and most reluctant to offer further advances except under cast iron guarantees. To escape this last problem, the municipality has – like some of the medieval kings did – offered the yield on particular municipal taxes before any other expenditures are considered. The situation is complicated by the sheer corruption of municipal government. The councillors are often there as representatives of local business, out to make a killing in municipal contracts. The web of bank-financed land speculators, large property owners, building and construction contractors, includes municipal officials and councillors. It is said that, while city workers are being sacked to cut costs, the municipality is still leasing office blocks that stand empty because they are not needed; the leases are favours to the banks that finance the land-purchase, the property speculators and building companies.

A different structure secures the voting base. The winning party rewards its followers not only with contracts, but also lucrative sinecures on the municipal payroll. The leaders of particular ethnic communities get their slice if they supported the winning horse. The trade union bureaucrats get their share of the spoils too, and if they seem to be effective in delivering the vote, in prosperous days, a grateful mayor looks to the conditions of trade union members.

The municipal unions have been able to build up a moderately strong position on wages as a result of this share out of spoils. In addition, successive administrations have tried to extend their political base by financing an extensive system of public welfare – hospitals and clinics, schools and what was until recently a free university (CUNY, with about a quarter

of a million students), as well as unemployment relief. In a slump, all these elements tend, to increase in cost just as the municipal revenue is contracting.

It is the welfare-education expenditure of the city as well as its wage bill which has made the New York crisis of national significance. The city has become a test case, the 'creeping socialist menace' to rally the backwoodsmen of the Right. As in Britain, one section of the ruling class is arguing that the crisis of profitability is so severe because of 'unproductive' public expenditure. Private profits must be salvaged by pruning the public sector.

Felix Rohatyn is a banker, leading proponent of the case against 'the social wage', and was head of the Municipal Assistance Corporation ('Big Mac'), the group of bankers set up by the State Government last June at the time of New York's first default crisis, to promote the sale of city bonds. When asked what sum the municipality needed to cut from its expenditure, Rohatyn replied, 'It's not a question of how much. The city has to change its lifestyle'. Thus, the city's 'lifestyle' became the anvil on which American capitalism was to hammer a new strategy of profitability.

The myth of New York's working class wallowing in its feather-bed, on a diet of welfare and free milk, was a useful one, particularly in demoralising the working class itself. It turned class anger into attacks on other workers, supposedly living off the fat of taxes. With some of the worst slums in the United States, a much higher level of unemployment, and a dirty ill-kept city, the myth would have been a joke if it had not been so effective.

The myth has been confirmed by the continual concessions made to the banks by the municipal authority and to the municipal authority by the trade union leadership. Mayor Beame spent a year vacillating, veering between the demands of his political base and the bankers, but all the time promising to pay until he was publicly removed from effective control by the State Governor. Yet still he had promised 67,000 redundancies, a sizeable pay cut for municipal employees, a three year wage freeze, severe cuts in welfare, medical and educational expenditure. It was never in doubt that 'changing the lifestyle of the city' meant in practice an assault on the poor. But to keep some, credibility, Beame also had to fiddle the books, yet that only increased the hysteria of the banks and the State Governor. It must have been the banks who put around the rumour in August that Beame was about to have a mental breakdown.

The municipality claims to have sacked 35,000 since last December. Some of the cuts were perhaps directed by Beame at the strongest unions (including the police and firemen) in the hope that the banks would relent or that strikes might be provoked which would frighten the banks. The overall pattern of sacking inevitably hit the poorest city workers hardest, particularly black and Puerto Rican employees, and affected the top paid least. As a result, as city services deteriorate, the unemployment relief bill soars.

The Labour Movement

THE attack could have been rolled back. But it required a national demonstration of the commitment of New York's workers not to be used to bail out the banks. In July, Rohatyn himself warned of the dangers of a general strike. But he need not have feared, for the trade union leadership bent all their best efforts to prevent any but token action. At the end, the union leaders pathetically offered up their members' pension funds to buy their own survival (by September, the pension funds of the teachers, firemen, policemen and municipal employees were all, to some extent, being used to stave off the bankruptcy of the city). De Loury of the dustmen even offered $1.5 million of his members' funds to buy off redundancies (Beame took the money, and continued with the sackings).

In July, there was a sudden upsurge in popular anger. The dustmen took unofficial strike action for three days; the highway workers occupied their depots, and sacked policemen blocked Brooklyn Bridge. But the teachers' union leader, Shankar, said he would take no initiative until early September when his members' contract came up for renegotiation. The transport workers restricted themselves to a demonstration, and welfare and hospitals did not move. The union leadership scuttled its members back to work. In September, as a

result, the teachers were left to fight alone, being finally sold out by Shankar, despite his earlier bold talk (14,000 teachers were not rehired, class sizes increased). Other union leaders grumbled, or like Barry Feinstein of the Teamsters, restricted themselves to empty bluster:

'I'm in favour of a general strike at this time. We have given our blood. The unions are bleeding to death.'

What finally forced President Ford to extend the minimum level of federal aid for very short-term relief, was not a revolt of New York's workers, but the revelation that if the city defaulted, some of the leading banks and large companies (like the giant ConEdison electricity company) might also go bankrupt. In November, it was discovered that 546 national banks were holding New York city bonds equal to 20 per cent of their capital, and 41 banks in New York State had municipal holdings equal to 50 per cent or more. Furthermore, the downward slide of the city threatened to impose bankruptcy on the State of New York, Ford, asked to give federal assistance last May, had allowed the situation to deteriorate so far that it had come to threaten the whole structure. There was no way of disentangling public and private capital. But the aid granted is on such restrictive terms, it is no more than keeping the city out of default so that it can continue with the cuts.

The New York working class was and still is in the forefront of the attack to save the system, and the municipal employees in the vanguard. The continuing defeat of New York's workers can only produce a general depression of militancy in other cities and unions. Yet at particular moments, a handful of dedicated city workers could have created the rank and file leadership capable of precipitating a general strike that would have compelled federal intervention on very different terms. One general strike with mass pickets on Wall Street would have forced Ford's hands, compelling him to concede much more as a political defence of the system than just the financial saving of the banks. As it is, workers blame some anonymous 'market' for failing to take up the City's bonds.

The Left in New York is larger than most other places. Yet it suffers from the bitter heritage of isolation and irrelevance. The city's crisis has delivered hammer blows at the traditional attitudes of New York workers, but the Left has not been able to relate to it. The Left's isolation brings the same sense of impotence before gigantic blind forces that afflicts the workers. No-one is prepared to gamble. Yet audacity is the precondition for a rank and file movement. It is not created by occasional leaflets or attending union meetings in a handful of workplaces. That is also required, but there is no 'building by slow accretion'. A rank and file movement is created by exercising audacious political leadership in conditions of momentary crisis – 'giving a lead' when there is a vacuum of leadership. That situation, with fluctuations, has existed in New York for the past year and will go on existing. It ought to be a top priority for any group with a serious orientation on building a rank and file movement and a mass workers' party.

TWO

THE growth of American capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s sucked in an enormous number of workers from Mexico, Puerto Rico, the rest of Central America and the Caribbean, from the Philippines and East Asia, just as the growth of the Common Market siphoned workers out of the Mediterranean countries to France and West Germany. Simultaneously, in both Europe and the United States, whites have been moving out of the assembly line and metal fabricating industries into better paid jobs in the service industries. In the United States, this has meant the movement of black workers and 'immigrants' to the old industrial centres of the north and north-east. The long traditions of southern racialism with its foundations in the interests of the slave owners have been passed over to the industrialists and the cities of the north. In the working class, the whites who cannot escape from the cities are particularly vulnerable to absorbing the interests of a white ruling class, as also are those trapped in a particular district that seems about to be absorbed into a black city. The blacks and immigrant groups similarly absorb the same savageries, opening rifts between, for example, southern-born and northern-born, between American blacks and Jamaicans, between blacks and Hispanic peoples and so on.

The effects of the divisions are not abstract. Between 1965 and 1968 the American blacks unknowingly assumed the natural militant leadership of the entire working class. Their politics created the tone and style of all mass politics that came after them; their cultural legacy dominates the Left. Yet the challenge to the system was destroyed by walling off the black leadership from its mass – and mainly white – audience, by reinvoking the racialist barrier. The leadership was then either murdered, exiled or bought off. In the last case, the reward was often some toehold in small capitalism (boutiques, record shops, Soul-food stores, African clothes trade etc) and absorption into the national political leadership: for example, the NAACP leaders, Julian Bond, Marion Bond and Andrew King, now respectively a Georgia Senator, Washington DC City Councillor and member of the House of Representatives. Much of the small capitalism has been swept away by the slump, but the political perks continue; the US Census authorities estimate that between 1970 and 1974 there was an increase in black elective officers in the country; the black population is 11½ per cent of the whole population).

Yet the condition of the mass of black people remains the same as before or has deteriorated. The National Urban League argues that black people have faced 'chronic depression' for 20 years, compounded by the economic catastrophes of recession in 1969-71 and slump in 1974-6. Real family income declined by over 3 per cent in 1973, to reach 58 per cent of the average white family income (in 1969, it was 61 per cent). About a third of all black families are classified as below the poverty line (9 per cent of all whites are below the line), and they make up about a third of all the poor. In mid-summer 1975, the black unemployment rate was officially 13.7 per cent (the white rate was 7.6 per cent), but according to the National Urban League, 25.7 per cent (the rate for black youth was estimated by the League to be between 40 and 60 per cent; the official rate for black youth at the end of 1975 was 37 per cent, and for white youth, 17.8 per cent).

The national picture is reflected in the worst areas of all major cities, whether they are generally prosperous or depressed. Take, for example, one of the most famous districts, Watts, with a population of 28,000 in the south-west corner of Los Angeles. Ten years ago the district became famous through its massive revolt that provided the immediate signal for the struggle of black people throughout the country. Yet, despite worsened conditions, there has been no revolt this year. The area is dominated by those on welfare, single mothers and the aged, with an unemployment rate said to be around 50 per cent. The median annual family income – including welfare payments – is around $6,000 (the national average for black families is now $7,500). The area is still 'an economic and spiritual desert', with high incidence of alcoholism, hard drug ailments and suicide (it is said that black males under the age of 25 have the highest rate of suicide for any similar group). However, the people of Watts, like those of Compton further south (a 50 per cent unemployment rate), have a consolation they were denied a decade ago – the Los Angeles mayor, the California State Lieutenant Governor and School Superintendant are all black.

The destruction of the Black Panthers' leadership and the decay of the Black Power movement into a defensive cultural style (exploited by black business – witness the shop sign, 'Black is Beautiful but Business is Business – don't ask for credit') has done considerable damage to the confidence of the mass of black people. Of course, the unemployed kids continue sporadic guerilla warfare, half revolt and half crime (against a police force much more heavily armed than ten years ago). According to the FBI, serious crime increased 18 per cent in 1974, with an increase of 15 per cent for boys under 18 and 21 per cent for girls (the under-18s accounted for 27 per cent of all arrests for serious crimes in 1974). Some proportion of that figure is black revolt.

There is also sporadic communal warfare, seen most sharply in 1975 in the clashes over bussing in Boston and Louisville, the summer warfare over the beach at Boston and demonstrations against the police and harassment in at least three States. The scale of bussing is enormous – 260,000 children are transported in Detroit daily – all to avoid improving schools adequately outside the rich

suburban areas. The movement between black and white working class districts provides a ready-made audience for the extreme Right.

It is a measure, however, of the relative weakness of the old forms of communal revolt that, fortunately, the extreme Right has not had more growth, whether it is the new retooled Ku Klux Klan ('sophisticated, college-educated, media-oriented'), front organisations like Louisville's 'Kentucky Taxpayers' League' or the openly Nazi organisations. Yet there was a temporary working class audience in both Louisville and Boston; in Louisville, the backbone of the white demonstrations identified themselves as trade unionists.

However, concealed in the relative decline of communal action is the growth in confidence of black workers in the mass production industries. With an effective basis of power on the shop floor, a new leadership is emerging, a leadership which, as a necessary element in its tactics of fighting, is becoming not simply the leadership of black workers but of all workers, including the whites and Spanish-speakers. To some extent, the demoralisation of communal politics is made that much worse by this development, but on the other hand, the future prospects of the emancipation of black people become much brighter. The press, of course, can see only 'race-conflict', so that the development of rank and file factory leadership receives much less attention than the communal riot. Ex-Black Panthers may well be the most important single source of the new factory leadership; their experience of the violence of the State, their political experience and sophistication, makes them the natural link between the communal revolt of the sixties and the working class revolution of the late seventies.

There are apparently many such small black groups and newspapers, most of them explicitly socialist, boring deep in the major industries, and to a greater or lesser extent, contesting the leadership of all workers in the workplace, not simply black workers. The discipline of the shop-floor and their suspicion of the white Left to some extent insulate them against the absurdities that afflict many, of the socialists – growing herbs in Arizona is an alternative to overthrowing capitalism. Yet it will also impede the creation of a mass workers' party. At the moment, the lack of any known national alternative makes the Left much weaker than it should be in terms of numbers. The first organisation to achieve national significance is likely thus to inherit all and grow quickly. But there is very little time to waste, given the perspectives for the system. Before the end of the decade, the Left, black and white, could be facing its decisive confrontation.

Third Note on the USA

Glenn Wolfe

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Transcribed & marked up by Einde O'Callaghan for *ETOL*.

*In **IS 85** we published an article by Nigel Harris under the title of* Two Notes on a Visit to the USA. *Here we print a critical comment by Glenn Wolfe, the National Secretary of the IS (USA).*

Any description of the potential for socialist agitation in the USA today must begin with an understanding of the gigantic impact of the world capitalist crisis of the American working class. After decades of stability and growth and without the sort of warning of things to come that British workers experienced through the 'stop-go' sixties, the US economy was plunged last year into a depression of almost 1930s proportions. By early 1975 official unemployment figures accounted for one worker in every eight, real wages had been cut by over 10 per cent in three years and inflation, while beginning to ease off, was still in double figures.

It was this situation which produced the New York City crisis which was expertly analysed in Harris's article. But in the same way as you cannot judge the impact of the British crisis from what you observe in the Inner London Boroughs, it is also impossible to get a balanced picture of the American crisis from an examination of the borough of Manhattan. For the same general crisis which crippled New York also put half a million auto workers out on the street for nearly a year. It brought a massive increase in speed-up and harassment for the truck-drivers who are the militant core of the two million-strong International Brotherhood of Teamsters. It produced a two-month unofficial strike of almost half of the country's coal miners. In short the impact on the organised working class and service industries, and particularly on black, latin and women workers was gigantic. And even now, in the midst of the shallow, election-year recovery, the working class is facing a ruling class offensive the like of which has not been felt in generations.

Let it be absolutely clear, it is amongst the most powerful and best organised industrial workers, not as Harris advises, the fragmented and isolated municipal workers, that a serious revolutionary organisation must build. For Harris is right about one thing. The American left suffers from 'a bitter heritage of isolation and irrelevance'. It is a heritage which must be destroyed and destroyed quickly.

The only organisation that has any record in breaking down this isolation and irrelevance by constructing a workers organisation based on actual leadership of a growing rank and file movement is the IS (USA). We got where we are because we had a conscious and successful strategy for using our limited resources in a consistent way at the points where revolutionary politics could have the greatest effect on the working class as a whole, jn auto, steel, mines, communications and transport.

But in discussing the New York situation Harris tells us that '... at particular moments, a handful of dedicated city workers would have created the rank and file leadership capable of precipitating a general strike ...' Now even if this impression were correct it would still mean that the IS (USA) in trying to organise its work around this formula would be forced to flit from issue to issue, and from place to place, thus having no impact on the real struggle and essentially just collectively hoping that a 'particular moment' might soon arise. The truth is that such a strategy would have condemned us to the twilight world of the middle-class sect and left the IS (GB) with no serious collaborators in the most powerful capitalist country in the world.

We do not deny that revolutionaries must be involved in all workers struggles, we certainly did not ignore the New York city crisis. But to state that the crisis 'ought to be a top priority for any group and mass workers party' and to castigate the 'left' for not 'precipitating a general strike' is akin to not only blaming the IS (GB) at a similar period in its development, for the defeat of the 1971 postal workers strike but also suggesting that the strike was a struggle of greater importance and more impact than the 1974 miners strike which smashed the wage freeze and defeated the government.

Harris argues that in America 'no one is prepared to gamble. Yet audacity is a pre-condition for a rank and file movement'. He is wrong, the IS (USA) is prepared to gamble. He is right, audacity is vital.

On 1 April the Master Freight Agreement covering 400,000 drivers and warehouse workers expired. This is the first, key-note contract in a round of employer/union bargaining which will set the wages and conditions for millions of workers up to

1979. The union side in these negotiations is the largest, and possibly the most corrupt, union in the world, the Teamsters. Last summer, with a handful of members and sympathisers representing almost insignificant forces in only half a dozen union branches, the IS took the lead in setting up an organisation called Teamsters for a Decent Contract (TDC) as a rank and file vehicle for organising a serious struggle on the contract. With a month still to go to the contract, and with IS members still very prominent, the TDC has chapters in almost 50 cities, it is a force in hundreds of union branches, and it has a weekly paper with a circulation of over 30,000. Despite a level of physical intimidation and political persecution that is totally unknown in countries like Britain, the TDC is beginning to put together the sort of workplace organisation that could stop the wheels of American industry turning. It has also already done the groundwork to contest the other major teamster contracts and will continue after those struggles as an ongoing rank and file movement with a broader political programme aimed at retaking the union for the members.

This has been largely an IS initiative, it is audacious and only a fool would think it is not a tremendous gamble for an organisation our size. For again Harris is right, so far there is no revolutionary organisation of 'national significance'. The strides we have made in size, worker membership and with our newspaper do not yet amount to a significant breakthrough. But with the teamster contract we are now creating the possibility of that breakthrough. With similar work already starting around the Autumn auto contract we are also taking another step to turn that possibility into a certainty. For one thing is clear. The potential for the creation of a workers revolutionary party in the USA hasn't been this great since the thirties.

As Harris pointed out, such a party will rely heavily on the vanguard role of black workers in the struggle. It will be a multi-racial party with a large proportion of black members and a heavy emphasis on the struggle for black liberation. And it is no accident that in making a turn to become a real force in the working class, the IS (USA) has begun to recruit significant numbers of black workers for the first time in its history.

As the struggle intensifies, this trend will deepen. The strong anti-racist emphasis of IS work, which has been recently demonstrated in the busing struggles in Louisville and Detroit, will further contribute to the eventual creation of a multi-racial workers party in the USA But no one should believe that there are any short-cuts to such a development. Racism in America has a depth and intensity which is qualitatively greater than anything which exists in Britain and which has real and damaging consequences even inside the revolutionary movement itself. Harris's vague reference to the great potential of ex-Panthers and un-named 'small black socialist groups' can only be misleading and tend to develop an incorrect impression that there are easy gains to be made by revolutionaries with the correct orientation. Unfortunately, any continuation in the plants of the black movement of the sixties is very much the exception rather than the rule and certainly cannot provide the basis for a strategy to build a viable workers party.

In conclusion it must be said that the fact that this article, with all its differences with the Harris US notes, can none the less appear in the **IS Journal**, is symptomatic of an important development in the world revolutionary movement. On the initiative of IS (GB) we are developing an international tendency which will have a growing impact on workers struggles in many of the major countries of the world. The **IS Journal** is no longer solely the property of British workers. It is becoming a weapon to be used by us all. We still have a lot to learn about building and running an international movement. For some years to come, much of the burden of providing leadership and resources for this work will fall on the IS (GB). Certainly the IS (USA) has learnt a vast amount from its British comrades and we feel no shame in admitting that we will continue for many years to lean heavily on the political and practical support that the IS (GB) provides. Thankfully we are now learning lessons from the Revolutionary Party of the Proletariat (PRP) in Portugal, as well as lessons we could not have learnt from Britain, for our British comrades do not operate in the heat of a revolution.

It is also the case that not everything that is correct for Britain and Portugal is correct for the USA. For example unlike the PRP we are not part of a working class which has a high level of consciousness and considerable revolutionary sentiment. Unlike the IS (GB) we are not part of a working class with a strong tradition of social democracy and Stalinism which creates certain advantages, for revolutionaries but which can also block the development of class struggle at key points. The American working class has its own traditions, it is historically extremely volatile, it is already armed to an amazing degree, it is riddled with racism and anti-communism. The strategy of the IS (USA), while based on the same principles of International Bolshevism as the IS (GB), while based on many of the same theories that were developed by our British comrades, cannot be a pale and inappropriate reflection of the British strategy. Nor can our Canadian, Irish, Portuguese, or indeed any other international comrades, be forced into every nock and cranny of the British mould.

However it is clear, that whatever minor mistakes are being made by the British IS in carrying out its responsibilities as the leader of our international tendency, they recede to insignificance when compared to the achievements. The constant readiness of the IS (GB) to assist its fraternal organisations, its willingness to openly debate the differences which arise, the overwhelmingly positive effects of its advice on its international collaborators. All these factors demonstrate that the IS (GB) will be as successful in its international work as it has been at home. From its present position as the leader of a single international tendency it is proving itself ready, able and worthy to play a vanguard role in the creation of a new international revolutionary movement.

Letter to the International Socialists (United States)

Monday, March 7, 1977

Comrades,
From everything we have read over the last six weeks, it appears that your EC has decided to pursue the course we advised against in January, namely, forcing the Left faction out. For the reasons we outlined in the Appeal from Tony Cliff and Duncan Hallas two weeks ago, we believe that this course—if agreed to by a majority of your membership—marks a qualitative descent by your organization into the graveyard of American sectlets.

There exists, it appears, a little confusion as to where our organization stands on the substantive political issues involved. This letter is intended to clear up any remaining doubts.

Economic Perspective

The decline of the Permanent Arms Economy as an international stabilizer during the 1960's encouraged an increasing synchronization of the business cycle throughout the world. Slumps now coincide throughout the world, and slumps are getting deeper, booms shallower.

World capitalism is thus in crisis. Earlier temporary palliatives, a significant rise in arms expenditure, an extension of imperialist control to cover new markets, are not available given the intense level of competition between the key national capitalisms.

Within this world crisis, US capitalism is experiencing a crisis of declining growth. By contrast, with the British crisis—chronic inflation, low investment, low productivity, massive balance of payments deficit, instability of the British Pound—American crisis is at a very early stage of development.

World capitalism is as strong as its weakest link. But United States capitalism is not that weakest link. Nor are the hammer blows struck against that link experienced equally all the way round the chain. in 1977, the OECD estimates that US growth will fall to 5 per cent, and British to zero. In ISJ 94 and ISJ 95 you will find the following charts, which, while indicating that the American crisis is much "milder" at this point than the British, also show that the crisis is genuinely world-wide. [Charts not included here]

A comparison of the last two charts, showing productivity in the motor industry and labor costs in manufacturing by 1974. draws out another element of the American crisis.

Yes, American workers are costing their employers nearly twice what British workers cost, but they are three times more productive. The rate of exploitation is much greater. The pace of work is tougher in the US and shift-working is endemic.

As the expansion of US capitalism begins to slow down, therefore, it makes workers unemployed more rapidly than does British capitalism. This and the weaker role of the trade unions explains why although at an earlier stage of acute crisis than Britain.

America has the same level of unemployment (the official figures currently are Britian: 6.1 percent; US; 8.2 percent—this difference is insignificant because the US figure is calculated on the basis of the total number of jobs and workers available in the economy, while the British

statisticians get a much lower figure by only counting those who actually register as unemployed).

What is the significance of this "milder crisis" analysis for the working class?

Firstly, the world slowdown has brought unemployment and/or short-time working back into the lives of millions of American workers for the first time since the 1930's. Coupled with even the low level of price inflation now being experienced (5 per cent as compared with 16 per cent in Britain) workers' living standards are being generally forced down.

For black workers in particular the slowdown increasingly means that unemployment becomes permanent and affects a larger and larger proportion of the black population.

The 1970's therefore, unlike the long years of substantial economic expansion, are bringing American workers back onto the stage of history.

The categories of rich and poor are beginning to be replaced by an awareness of class.

Yet we must not exaggerate the force force of this change. Unemployment benefit for laid-off carworkers in the United States, for example, still exceeds a carworker's weekly take home wage in Britain (and prices are now hardly any higher in the US than in
Britain).

And the experience in Britain, now 15 years into a crisis that began in the early 1960's, is that breaking through the stranglehold of ruling class (including racist) ideas is a very, very long process indeed.

Secondly, the fact that the American crisis is "milder" than in other parts of the world, means that the American ruling class have other methods of trying to solve it than those of brute force and/or political cooption currently being used in Britain and Italy.

It appears likely at this point that the employers will attempt a new productivity offensive aimed at culling labor costs. If true, this is far from a last-ditch effort, and suggests a significant degree of confidence on the side of the ruling class, which we should not underestimate.

Another side of the ruling class offensive to halt the long-term decline in the rate of profit in the midst of a world crisis, will be their continuing attack on the public sector. In a long drawn out crisis, the ruling class can make attack after attack on the quality of life as indicated by the level of social services without precipitating either a complete breakdown or a major revolt. Yet these attacks, on education, health, social welfare, and even on transport services, are in many ways more visible to workers as a class (those who work in the public sector and those who consume the services) than is the productivity offensive.

Lastly, and perhaps of the greatest significance for the American working class, the relatively mild character of the present crisis means there is correspondingly little pressure on working class organizations to react to it.

Scattered throughout the 1970's, from the wildcat strikes amongst Teamster union members in 1970, through Miners For Democracy to the Chrysler rebellion of 1973 there are
repeated traces of rank and file militancy.

Yet in virtually every trade union, business unionism (the domination of the members by the union bureaucracy in the interests of management-bureaucracy collaboration) has survived unscathed. In the miners' union it may even be staging a comeback.

The record number of strikes that took place in 1974, most following the end of wage controls on May 1, did not create a permanent cutting edge that could sustain a struggle in the recession of 1975. The token displays of fight provided by the Teamsters' and Autoworkers' Unions in 1976, in the aftermath of recovery from recession, also failed to ignite independent rank and file bush
fires. And 1977, beginning with the victory of the business machine in the steelworkers' union, looks likely to tell a similar story.

The picture remains a mosaic: fragments of militancy here and there; occasionally they take on a certain temporary, accidental order; then the pattern disappears again. The organized socialists, necessary to give isolated rank and file militancy a wider coherence, were driven from the trade unions in the 1950's. In the movements of the 1970's and 1980's they are still to be re-made.

James P. Cannon wisely observed that "If the (revolutionary) group misunderstands the tasks set for it by the conditions of the day, if it does not know how to answer the most important of all questions in politics-that is, the question of what to do next—then the group, no matter what its merits may otherwise be, can wear itself out in misdirected efforts and futile activities and come to grief."

Are the "conditions of the day" in the United States in 1977 ripe for "mass work" and "building a workers' combat organization"? That is the question which is at the hub of the faction fight in your organization today. Unequivocally, the analysis above leads us to answer no!

"Mass work" in our revolutionary tradition implies exactly what it says: we assess the political "conditions of the day" as being favorable to the direct intervention of revolutionary politics in the

broad class struggle; then, assuming we have the necessary forces, we organize that intervention.

This is very different from "work with your fellow workers" which all revolutionaries carry on (or should do) to build up their credibility on the day-to-day issues facing them, like wages, safety, sackings etc. "Mass work" is therefore a distinct political process, one that becomes possible when the level of class struggle and consciousness among masses of workers can be clearly raised as a result of revolutionary workers carrying through a decisive course of
action.

The suggestion that the class struggle and the penetration of revolutionaries are at this level in the United States today is, for us, both absurd and politically dangerous.

Chest-beating talk of a "workers combat organization" does not impress us either. Certainly, revolutionary "combat organizations" can be created independently of the level of working-class struggle, but genuine workers' organizations are not.

The fatal flaw of many Trotskyist organizations throughout the world has been to ignore this simple but basic truth. As a result, they have easily degenerated into sects, pacing their internal regimes and expectations not on the level of struggle in the real world, but on their own analysis predicting the big bust—always tomorrow.

Great levels of sacrifices are demanded from the comrades (your National
Secretary boasts that one third of your membership is ready to tear up its roots and move anywhere at the command of the organization) and for a time things might even hold together.

Sooner or later, however, they fall apart. Quite simply, the greater the differentiation the sect draws between the sacrificing member and ordinary people, the fewer genuine people it
recruits.

If you intend to remain at all true to a serious perspective, aiming to help create a revolutionary party numbering hundreds of thousands, that is largely made up of manual workers, and really does combat the ruling class, then it does matter that you are both honest:
and modest. For if you don't know where you are now, don't expect workers to come looking for you.

This is why, in January 1977, for example, we published in ISJ 94 the following sober account of the problems facing the new Socialist Workers' Party and the embryonic rank and file organizations in Britain:

"*At the same time the ability to intervene independently, to deliver even simple solidarity action with workers involved in particular struggles, is still minimal if not altogether lacking.*

"This fact is not at all the fault of the Organising Committee: least of all is it due to 'lack of correct programme' or 'failure to discuss the nuts and bolts of the policies' as various and assorted splinter groups inevitably asserted.

"The problem is one of the relationship of forces, of the still embryonic state of confidence and cohesion on the militant left, of a level of consciousness that makes it difficult to transcend sectionalism."

An honest appraisal of what can be done is the best starting point for changing things.

Does this mean that revolutionaries in the US should resign themselves to inactivity or discussion group politics? Far from it.

The economic perspective outlined above will, if the group does not "wear itself out" or go completely off the rails, guide you towards a different but realistic and important question.

Are the "conditions of the day" ripe for recruiting tens and indeed hundreds of individual workers to revolutionary socialism? To that question we answer yes, provided you actually know "what to do next."

"What to do next" in our book starts from basic honesty about where you are. To waste paper proving how "successful" you are by boasting of 20 to 30 "workers" among your 280 members is not a good sign. Nor is the division of your tiny membership into first- and second class-citizens (Teamsters and "the rest"), and the political denigration of public sector and white collar workers and students.

Not only does this approach indicate an absolutely mechanical approach to the possibilities for the class struggle in the United States but it also actually impedes recruitment and the integration of new members in the here and now.

A new awakening of American working-class consciousness is only just beginning. Those who argue that it can take off sharply again, as in the mass unionizing drives of 1933-4 forget that not only was the crisis more severe then, but more important still, socialists and socialist organizations had been active in working class struggles during most of the preceding twenty years.

Today, by stark contrast, socialists have played virtually no part at all in workers' struggles in the US during the last twenty years.

The American working class is possibly among the most fragmented in the world. Fragmented by geography; fragmented by race and ethnic origin; fragmented by sex; fragmented by the political defeat

of the 1940's which wiped out its socialist tradition and institutionalized bureaucratic control of its trade unions; and fragmented by the experience of living through the twenty-five years of capitalism's biggest ever boom.

The likelihood that the early stirrings of this class will reveal themselves in mass, nationwide rank and file upheavals is therefore, we suggest, remote. Revolutionaries in the United States today, we believe, should look to the fragments, to the groups of workers and the individuals often isolated both by geography and by the trade union bureaucracy, who are prepared to fight.

The need for national rank and file organizations to mobilize the masses in struggle against the employers and the bureaucrats, like the need for a workers' party, must be central to the socialist argument we present. But be wary of confusing this propaganda position with the promise that we are capable right now of overcoming fragmentation. Phony triumphalism breeds demoralization.

Our answer to that key question posed by Cannon, What to do next?, must be: gear the organization up for a series of interventions in the fragments of the class struggle that occur in the areas where we have members. Encourage every member to think and work as an organized socialist inside his or her workplace. "Insiders" can often make more effective interventions than "outsiders" although working from the outside is an inevitable and necessary task as well.

The role of the revolutionary paper, servicing both inside and outside interventions with argument on the specific struggles taking place and making the case for socialism, is therefore crucial to both. The organization and its members must see the need to grow as your most important contribution to the struggle.

Unless the revolutionary socialist current has expanded to a certain take-off point where it becomes (even if on a very small scale) available to those workers ready to start generalizing from the fragments, then however concentrated your tiny numbers in one or two particular fragments, you will be irrelevant to the unfolding of events.

Precisely because of the enormous fragmentation of the American working class the size of the revolutionary socialist current is key.

How to build

How does a small revolutionary group grow so that it can become a significant current?

This is one of the questions at the center of the differences between the ISUS leadership on the one hand, and the Left Faction and ourselves on the other.

All historic experience is that a small socialist group (which is what you are) does not grow in the main from its direct intervention in class struggles.

Historically, socialist groups have always gone through a period in which they have been little more than propaganda circles before being able to attract substantial numbers of workers from their direct interventions. This has been particularly true when the class struggle has been at a relatively low ebb (with occasional, not too bitter, not too long, strikes as in the US at present).

It took the Marxists in Russia, for instance, nearly 20 years from the foundation of the first circles to the establishment of the beginning of a real party. The circles of course contained many workers—but they were usually unusual workers, as Krupskaya's biography of Lenin shows, attracted more by the ideas than by the mass agitation of the party.

The "pre-history" of our organization (the Socialist Workers Party of Britain) was even longer—indeed, it is not fully over even now. During those long years, like the Marxist circles in Russia we paid continual close attention to the development of the mass workers movement, to the strikes, the union elections, the conferences.

We insisted that only in this movement was the potential for recasting history to be found. We commented on what needed to be done on a day to day basis in the working-class movement. But the actual growth of our movement took place on a different basis—from workers and non-workers who were attracted by general ideological issues, whose origin was often (or even usually) in struggles that did not spring directly from the factories.

Key fields for the "primitive accumulation" of members for us were, for example, the anti-nuclear movement of the 1960's and the reflection of this inside the Labour Party youth organization.

Like revolutionary organizations throughout the world a fantastic boost to our organization (in terms of worker members as well as students and white collar) came from the "Victory to the NLF" and student movements of the late 1960's, to which we succeeded in giving considerable leadership.

These political, mainly non-worker movements, only tangentially related to the class struggle, provided us with an audience to whom we could argue the centrality of the struggle in the factories. The people we won in these arguments were not, of course, usually the "best militants" in the factories.

But they did give us the numbers and the confidence to begin to attract some of the best workers thrown up by the economic struggles of 1969-74 to our organization, without having to resort to the demoralizing and depoliticizing device of sending ex-student missionaries into the factories. (In the same way the individual isolated workers (and students) drawn to Marxism before the mid 1890's in Russia were thereby to organizations large enough to attract large numbers of workers in later years.)

Even with the development of big struggles in 1969-74, it was not by any means always the case that it was "the best militants" who were attracted to us. 99 per cent of workers were still attracted by our politics, as well as by our willingness to relate those politics to their work situation. It was these individually recruited workers, often drawn from areas which were not central to the national class struggle, that enabled our organization to develop a working-class style and to attract other workers.

And above all, it was not just the big nationally significant confrontations of the class that opened up workers' minds sufficiently for them to consider revolutionary ideas. Even today, recruitment to our party comes as often as not from individuals involved in small struggles, isolated from the main battle lines, involving fairly small numbers of workers, (e.g. a long drawn out battle of a small group of workers against a very reactionary small employer can
politicize workers much more than relatively short-lived struggles by the big battalions—and, of course, our organization can seem more significant to small groups of workers involved in struggle than to the giants).

Let us repeat, for a small revolutionary group, there is a difference between the goal you focus on at the end of the day—leading the great battalions of the class into battle—and the way you build towards that goal, through individual recruitment on the basis of winning people to a total socialist perspective.

A key danger for your organization, we believe, is the failure of your leadership to recognize this difference.

The reason why we have been so concerned to intervene in the debate in your organization, and to support the Left Faction, is that we have seen the consequences of such a failure on other organizations in Britain.

They moved in one of two directions (if not both simultaneously). Either to become insignificant sects with an inflated opinion of themselves (the path of Gerry Healy) or reaching an accommodation with the trade union bureaucracy (the path of Ken Coates, and spasmodically, of the Fourth International).

In the much more difficult situation that exists for revolutionaries in the US today, the road to one or other form of deformation (or both combined) can be much quicker than that in Britain in the 1950's and 1960's.

Economism and the Popular Front

An incorrect analysis of the period, followed by the almost inevitable orthodox Trotskyist conclusion that the tiny group has to substitute itself for the lack of motion on the part of the class, also leads over time to the bending of the essential politics of the group. Whether it bends in an ultraleftist direction or to the right (or even in both directions) is determined by the politics of its leadership and the character of its principal initiatives as it sets off on the road to degeneration.

In *Lenin Vol 1* Tony Cliff clearly points to the dangers inherent in an exaggerated stress on the correct need for the early Russian Marxists to turn towards agitation.

"'On Agitation (1894 pamphlet) had a mechanical theory of the relation between the industrial struggle, the struggle against the employers, and the political struggle against Tsarism, based on the concept of 'stages.' In later years this became the theoretical foundation for the development of 'economism'..."

Cliff describes this stages theory as follows:

"Socialists should limit their agitation to purely economic issues, first to the industrial plant, then to interplant demands, and so on. Secondly, from the narrow economic agitation the workers would learn, through experience of the struggle itself, the need for politics."

And he quotes Krupskaya on the timing of the development of this tendency:

'The weavers' strike of 1896 took place under Social Democratic (marxist) influence. This turned the heads of many comrades. The basis arose for the growth of 'economism.'"

A well-known historian is quoted approvingly by Cliff for his description of the relation between agitation and economism:

"From agitation, which pushed politics into the background as a matter of tactical expedience, it was only one step to economism proper, which subordinated politics to economics as a matter of principle."

How do revolutionaries concerned to undertake agitation avoid this step? Duncan Hallas pointed out (in an article recently reproduced from ISJ 56 in your Internal Bulletin) that "The economists were so called because they advocated 'assistance to the economic struggle of the

proletariat' as an alternative to building a party…" And Cliff quotes Lenin's reply to the economists written from Siberia in 1899:

"For the socialist, the economic struggle serves as the basis for the organization of the workers into a revolutionary party, for the strengthening and development of their class struggle against the whole capitalist system, if the economic struggle is taken as something complete in itself there will be nothing socialist in it... It is the task of the bourgeois politician 'to assist the economic struggle of the proletariat'... The task of the socialist is to further the indissoluble fusion of the economic and political struggle into the single class struggle of the socialist working-class masses.

Agitational activity among the masses must be of the broadest nature, both economic and political, on all possible issues and in regard to all manifestations of oppression whatever their form."

Thus the short step towards economism is avoided by the continuous stress on the need for independent working class politics; by the rejection of a "stages theory"; and by the use of all agitation for the purpose of building the revolutionary organization.

No one in the leadership of USIS today would challenge any of these assumptions in theory. Yet the practice of your organization today exactly meets the description "economist."

This is what is implied when your paper is not sold because your members are too busy distributing copies of a rank and file publication. This is what is meant when comrades argue it was "necessary to liquidate the IS" into last year's Teamster work. And, more critically, this is what's meant by the stages theory you have developed for the building of a revolutionary socialist party in the United States.

This stages theory is available in many different forms, like the two expressed in your November 1975 pamphlet *The Struggle for Workers' Power*:

1) "As the crisis of capitalism deepens, members of the IS will prove themselves to be the best and most effective leaders of the rank and file movements that will grow to massive proportions. These movements, in turn, will sort out and select the most dynamic and dedicated working class militants, who will be open to recruitment to a revolutionary program, politics, and organization."

2) "To defend itself the working class needs a massive rank and file movement uniting blacks and whites, men and women, young and old, to fight the bosses and make them pay for the growing crisis instead of us. When the crisis gets bad enough, even this won't be enough. The working class will need its own revolutionary party to overthrow capitalism."

To put it bluntly, we believe that the argument that the peculiar conditions of the United States (and Portugal!) mean that the revolutionary party will be built after a massive united anticapitalist rank and file movement has come into existence is to stand Marxism on its head.

It is pure economic determinism that can only lead one way: to political passivity and accommodation to anyone who happens to have a lever with the "rank and file" at any particular point in time.

We maintain, on the contrary, that the fantastic strength of American capitalism and the relative weakness of the American working class make it less likely than elsewhere that spontaneous working-class movements will develop in advance of the building of a powerful revolutionary socialist current.

Even in Britain, where pro-capitalist ideas have a weaker grasp on the consciousness of the working class and the crisis is more developed than in the US, our experience has been that rank and file movements require thousands (and possibly tens of thousands) of conscious socialists within them in order to take off, let alone survive.

The expectation that the crisis will deliver the movement, and that the main task for revolutionaries is simply to be there ready to lead it, strengthens the political danger of the phoney "mass work" method.

In essence this is to search for the lowest common denominator demand that can evoke any response, then to organize around it, and finally, to claim any movement that results as a "victory for revolutionary mass work" (in spite of the total absence of any specific socialist dimension).

Well, if what matters is no longer the demands you raise, but what results you get, then clearly who you associate with takes on a vital significance. This explains why your leadership is now abusing another strategic term that used to have a clear meaning in our revolutionary tradition, "the united front." Along with their misuse of the terms "mass work" and "workers' combat organization" it is being employed to masquerade a drift to the right in the clothes of a viable revolutionary tactic.

The united front is, of course, the strategic political concept born during the third and fourth Congresses of the Communist International when the revolutionary tide in Europe was being rolled bake, and later applied with particular skill by Trotsky in his analysis of Germany in the early 1930's.

It is about periods when revolutionaries need to unite in action with others in the working-class movement to defend existing gains and lay the basis for advance. It assumes that the revolutionaries have significant forces at their disposal yet are still too weak to accomplish the immediate tasks confronting the class alone.

Unlike the attempt to win individual non-revolutionary workers into activity with us in our workplaces, which is something we should be doing at all times, the united front strategy is therefore not applied at all times. When the revolutionary left is very small without any real forces at its command, when the class is not in retreat, when there is no real possibility of testing differences in action before the class, and in numerous other situations, we do not apply
the united front strategy.

We do not therefore believe that the united front, or the struggle to build it, has any application in today's conditions in the United States. To the extent that you try to do so, then the step is so inappropriate that it will force you towards a popular front with forces well to your right, and in which you will surrender your politics. Duncan Hallas in the February 1977 ISJ 95 describes our approach to working with the trade union bureaucracy and contrasts it with the popular frontism of the CPGB:

"We are for unity in action with all those in the working-class movement who are willing to fight, even when the agreement about objectives is only partial and temporary. This includes of course, unity with whatever sections of the 'official leaderships' can be induced to collaborate in particular actions. Contrary to the CP claim, we are not ultra-lefts.

However, to cooperate with left wing union leaders—and indeed with right-wing ones where possible—for particular ends is by no means the same as relying on them. Still less is it the same as believing that 'progressive officials' can ever he a substitute for organized rank and file activity. This is the basic disagreement between the CP (and most of the Labour Left) and ourselves on the industrial and trade union issues.

We believe that active and effective rank and file movements are indispensable. The CP once thought so too. Now it puts the emphasis on the 'left political alliance,' the core of which are the 'left officials.' The difference is not an accidental or transient one. It is fundamental."

Your recent practice, in the motor industry contract and election in the Steelworkers' union, where you formed or worked uncritically within alliances with "progressive
officials" had nothing to do with the united front. They were popular front "alliances" (if that's not too grand a name for activities involving a total of about 25 of your members) characterized by i) a near total absence of action; ii) your reliance on the left bureaucrats for results; iii) your refusal to raise your own demands within the alliance; iv) your non-critical attitude towards the bureaucrats you were involved with; v) the absence of any attempt to build independent organized rank and file activity within the alliances; vi) your weakness on the ground which pushed you to play down your politics even more than you had intended.

Our task when left union bureaucrats are up for election is not to build illusions in the rank and file about what great changes are in store if they get elected; but rather it is to continuously point to the dangers of relying on them, particularly those of a left variety and to get the argument into the open about what real issues need taking up and fighting over. We summed up this analysis in relation to the election of left governments in ISJ 94 as follows:

"The lesson for revolutionary socialists is clear. It is certainly necessary to support the coming to power of left governments. In France and Italy the establishment of a left government would undoubtedly raise the level of struggle and strip the bureaucracy of excuses. But this is only a subordinate theme, not the main emphasis. The primary task for revolutionaries is to arm workers for the attacks that come from the left at least as much as from the right. That means the building of rank and file movements independent of the union bureaucracy, and able to fight directly and unambiguously in workers' interests. The form of such movements will vary enormously according to national union structures and traditions; the principle will not."

Conclusion

Our intervention has been characterized by your leadership as "frivolous", "personally motivated," "irresponsible." An attempt has been made to make it appear that "the British" are passable in Britain but "chauvinist," "insular," "seeing only through British eyes" the minute we leave our island. Quotations have been dug up to try and prove our inconsistency with the clear implication—don't take them seriously.

Comrades, it is an old debating trick to try and defeat an argument by attacking the credibility and motives of your opponents.

We have intervened, written two letters to your leadership, sent a CC
member to tour the States for a month, and supported the Left Faction in their fight to turn the group from its present right-ward drift, because we are serious

internationalists. We are not only concerned in the abstract about the strength of the revolutionary left in the United States, but because at some point in the future, the question will become an immediate practical
one for us.

In order to survive, any revolution in Western Europe will have to spread to the heart of international capitalism, North America. This is why, in the midst of an important expansion of the SWP when we are under the biggest attack from the ruling class and the trade union bureaucracy, we nonetheless have made time to concern ourselves with the crisis in the ISUS.

The seriousness with which we take your present crisis is also the reason
that Steve Jefferys, on the basis of a decision taken by our Central Committee, informed your EC on 19 January that it they went ahead and expelled the Left Faction we would sever relations with the ISUS rump and give what support we could to the Lefts in their task of building a genuinely democratic revolutionary socialist organization.

We indicated that in our opinion the political differences which existed within the ISUS were compatible within your organization, and indeed, within our joint tradition. We made it absolutely clear that we were opposed to a split but in the event of your leadership continuing with its chosen course and expelling the Lefts we would give our full support to them. That is
still our position today.

Trotsky wrote that "A false political theory bears within itself its own punishment. The strength and obstinacy of the apparatus only augments the dimensions of the catastrophe."

To those members of ISUS who believe they can tinker with the apparatus and so avoid the catastrophe we wish to make two final points.

First, don't allow your actions to be determined by previous personal feuds. A false political theory is at the heart of the crisis in ISUS. It is to that theory that you must address yourselves.

And second, don't delude yourselves about the extent to which the apparatus can be controlled. In his article for ISJ 40 on *Building the Leadership*, Duncan Hallas described the internal regime of the Healey group in Britain as follows:

"Discussion, which is dangerous to the leadership, can be checked by hyper activity; and this, in turn, is justified by the nearness of crash (or bust). The membership, driven at a frenzied pace, has a high casualty rate. A large proportion is always new and therefore does not remember the nonfulfillment of past prophecies. A vicious circle is set up which makes the correction of the line more and more difficult...

The leadership, which alone has much continuity, becomes unchallengeable and finds it less and less necessary to check its policies and practice."

The expulsion of nearly a third of your membership, after a mere three months discussion, must be close to a record even for Healey's standards of sectarian faction fights.

An apparatus that initiates and then gets away with this kind of manoeuvre is virtually independent of its declining membership, whether its remaining rank and file supporters on the left or the right believe so or not.

The SWP(GB) protests against the proposed expulsion of the Left Faction from ISUS, calls on the Political Solution faction to unite against the expulsions, and urges the whole Convention to reject the drift to the right.

Central Committee, Socialist Workers Party (Great Britain)